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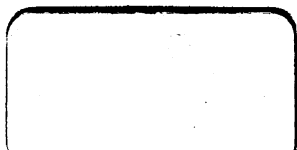
LOOKING-AFTER SANDY



MARGARET TURNBULL

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"PLEASE, SIR, I'D LIKE TO BE THE ONE MORE"

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

A SIMPLE ROMANCE

BY

MARGARET TURNBULL

AUTHOR OF "MAGGIE'S TALE"

ILLUSTRATED



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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TO
F. S. T.

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PART I

Lord, give to men who are old and rougher
The things that little children suffer.

MASEFIELD.

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

I

THE FLIGHT

HIGH up on the side of one of the Orange Mountains stood a little ramshackle cottage surrounded by a bit of ground that looked strangely neglected and uncared for. The weather-beaten picket fence sagged and the outside of the house had a dreary, unpainted look.

Inside it was even drearier, for yesterday there had been a funeral in the house, and old Miss Perkins had been laid to rest in the green cemetery. To-day The Heir was taking possession.

The Heir was a dry-faced, thin-lipped man of about fifty, a second cousin who had never come near the poor old maiden lady in her lifetime, but was now ready to snap up all that had been hers—that is, all but Sandy.

Sandy sat in the kitchen by the fire in the range, drying her feet. She had had to run so many errands in the cold spring rain for The Heir and the neighbors that her feet had gotten chilled and wet. Her hands were cold, as well as her tear-stained face. She hoped nobody would call her for a few minutes

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at least. She had just gotten back from the real-estate office, and Mr. Todd, the real-estate agent, was in the next room talking to The Nearest Neighbor and The Heir.

Sandy called him The Heir, because she really didn't know whether his name was Perkins or not. Nobody had taken the trouble to introduce them. One of the neighbors had said in an undertone to him, "That's the girl," and he had said "H'm!" and cleared his throat, and then:

"Send some one to fetch Mr. Todd, will you?"

And Sandy had been sent.

Evidently they did not know she was in the kitchen, or had forgotten, or didn't care, for nobody came in and ordered her to run another errand, or to get wood or coal, or wash dishes. Sandy sat herself down to rest in comfort and spread her thin hands toward the fire.

She could hear the talk in the next room, but at first it wasn't at all interesting to a girl of eleven, being all about land values and the new hotel site, and things like that. But gradually even she began to perceive, from the pleased tones of The Heir and the gaiety of Mr. Todd and The Neighbor, that Miss Perkins' little bit of ground was going to be worth something to The Heir, after all.

Sandy thought of Miss Perkins, who had been kind to her, and who had gone away now, never to come back to this house.

"I 'spect," said poor lonely Sandy, "that Miss Perkins's a lot better off 'n Heaven. Guess she can hear by now, and see better too."

At that thought Sandy straightened herself up and tried to look cheerful. "It isn't," she an-

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nounced to herself, "quite the right thing to spoil a person's first day in Heaven by being such a weepy sight—if she can see me. But, oh, I wisht she'd stayed a little longer with me."

Just then Sandy heard her name spoken in the next room. She started up to say, "Yes, sir," and get ready to run another mile or so, when she heard something that made her know she was not wanted.

"What 'll you do about looking after Sandy?" Mr. Todd repeated, in an effort to get the attention of The Heir.

"Who's Sandy?" snapped The Heir.

"Why, the girl from the County House. 'Sandy' she's called for short. Her real name's Alexandria, an' ol' maid—ol' Miss Perkins—was very fond of her."

"I can't help that," answered The Heir, shortly. "I'm a bachelor. I've no home for her. She'd best go back where she came from."

"Why, that being the case," Mr. Todd answered, a little astonished at The Heir's absolute indifference, "and being as I'm Town Councilman, we'll take the matter up at our meeting Tuesday night."

"Meantime," asked The Neighbor, "where'll the girl stay?"

"Can't she stay here?" demanded The Heir.

"Pretty lonely for a child," said The Neighbor, not unkindly. "If no one else offers, I'll take her in till Wednesday morning."

"By that time I'll have the wagon round for her," Mr. Todd agreed, cheerfully, "and now, as to my percentage—"

Sandy listened no longer. A fresh gulf of sorrow yawned before her. Not only had she lost Miss Perkins. She had lost her home!

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

It would seem a poor sort of home to most people, this little four-roomed cottage, with its shabby walls and shabbier furniture, but for two years it had been a dear place to Sandy. For nine long years she had been a fatherless, motherless scrap of a child in the big County House or Poorhouse, and no one had loved her or been hers to love.

Two years ago old, half-deaf, half-blind Miss Perkins had gone over to the House to get a small girl to do her dishes and errands; and, seeing the forlorn Sandy, had in some miraculous way divined that the girl needed her as much as she needed help. So Sandy had found a home, some one who loved her; some one who listened, even if you did have to holler a little to make her hear, to all the wondrous small things of each day; some one who cared about her—just her, just Sandy—whether her feet were cold or wet, whether she was fed or hungry, whether she laughed or cried.

Sandy was crying now.

To go back there! To go back to the House and all it meant!

Then she heard them speak her name again. Evidently The Heir had bethought himself that his willing abandonment of the child might not look well in the eyes of his companions. At any rate, if there was a better and equally, to him, inexpensive way he was willing to try it.

"By the by," he said, "isn't there some person who would like to take the child into their home and, ah—make her—useful?"

"Well," drawled The Neighbor, "I guess not. Children is pretty thick and plenty in this part of Jersey. Everybody I know's got a family of their own."

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"And them that ain't," continued Mr. Todd, taking up The Neighbor's tale, "ain't anyways gasping to take on any family troubles. I did talk to Mrs. Whiting, who's got nuthing but two parrots, a dog, and a monkey."

"Well?" questioned The Heir, impatiently. "Well?"

"Well, she hadn't no time for the idea. Said the monkey was that delicate that it was as much trouble as a baby, and she couldn't spare any more time from Tootles and Wobbles—them's the parrots—and if she could, her husband thought she owed it to Google-eyes—that's the dog—to lay it out on him."

"H'm!" said The Heir. "The child is an un-attractive child."

"Sandy's all right, even if her hair is red," the good-humored Neighbor asserted. "But, you see, nobody knows where she came from or who she is. A foundling, you see, and stock is stock. A body wants to know what he's bringing into the house, you see."

"Precisely," agreed The Heir. "Then she'll have to go to the Poorhouse."

They lit their pipes again. All but The Heir. He was not a smoker. The discussion of prices, unpaid taxes, and furniture auctions began anew. They had dismissed Sandy finally from their minds and conversation. She would be there when they wanted her.

They reckoned without Sandy. After the first burst of sorrow she straightened herself up in her chair. On no account must she spoil Miss Perkins' first day. It was not to be thought of. They had talked it over one Sunday not long ago and agreed

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that it was the part of the one left behind to be as "brave as she could be" for the other's sake.

"I'll be brave, Miss Perkins," whispered Sandy, her face pressed against the window nearest the cemetery. "I'll be brave. But you didn't know it was going to be this way, I'm sure."

Sandy was right. Miss Perkins had meant to make a will, leaving all she had to help Sandy along; but she had died, quite suddenly, without doing this, and the whole of her earthly goods was for The Heir. But Sandy had had Miss Perkins' love, and, whether you are eleven or seventy-seven, nothing can take the love that has been yours away from you.

Sandy rubbed her eyes a very little, and then rubbed the glass so that she could see out plainer, for she was trying to think; and it's easier to think if you look out of doors at green things, even if it is misty and foggy and rainy.

Nobody was stirring except The Neighbor's dog, who, having been left on the doorstep to amuse himself, had unearthed an old rubber shoe somewhere and was having a wonderful time chasing, growling, and worrying it.

Sandy watched him a little, and inevitably her mind traveled back along Rags' career. He had followed The Neighbor home one night and refused to be lost, to be traded, to be kicked or driven from his self-selected home; and The Neighbor had ended by being fond of him. Wherever Neighbor went Rags went; and at home the children loved Rags and played with him. Rags was their dog. Yet, as Sandy thought rather sadly, Rags came from nowhere and was nobody.

THE FLIGHT

She was glad that horrid Mrs. Whiting and her husband didn't want her. If they loved monkeys and pecking parrots and dogs that looked like the kitchen mop better than real human girls, why, let them.

Then Sandy's conscience smote her. Monkeys couldn't do for themselves in this country. If they were as far from home as this she, Sandy, didn't envy them a good place to stay in. No; she was glad they had it. And parrots! Parrots were lovely! She could still remember the thrill of delight she had had when Wobbles and Tootles had whistled and talked to her out of the Whitings' window. Green-tailed birds talking! It was like a fairy tale. No; since things were as they were, she didn't blame Mrs. Whiting. Parrots were lots of amusement, and The Heir had said she was "an unattractive child." "Unattractive" is a pretty big word, but Sandy judged from the way in which it was said it meant that she was not pretty.

That saddened her for a moment, until she remembered that Miss Perkins had told her she looked lovely the morning she had put on her new white dress to go to Sunday-school in, and Miss Perkins probably knew better than The Heir.

She climbed on a chair and looked in the old rosewood-framed mirror with the bar across and the roses frosted on the glass at the top. She saw a thin-faced, red-haired girl. The very thick hair was in two big braids, and the dark-gray eyes were surmounted by eyebrows so light that they seemed hardly to be there. Sandy remembered as she scrutinized herself that one girl in the village had called her a "Chink" because of those very eye-

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brows. "Chink" was the local equivalent for Chinaman.

Sandy looked herself over carefully. Her eyes were swollen with weeping now, and she was paler than usual. No one had given much thought to Sandy's eating and drinking for days. On the whole, however, she was quite neat and tidy. She drew up the brown-and-white striped stockings on her thin legs, hitched her apron over her shoulder and smoothed it out. Then she went to the corner cupboard and drew out from behind the sugar-bowl a big yellow china orange, with a slit in the middle.

This was Sandy's bank, and the money in it was her very own. She took it out to the back door, and took the hatchet with her; then, closing the door behind her softly, hit the bank a blow with the hatchet.

When she returned to the kitchen the china orange lay in bits in the corner of the wood-pile, but in Sandy's hand there were eighty-seven cents: four fives, six tens, and seven pennies.

Sandy put on her brown tam-o'-shanter hat and her fuzzy brown coat, both made by Miss Perkins' slender old fingers out of an old coat of her own. Sandy went up-stairs softly and gathered together her nightgown, another apron, her Sunday-school Bible, and her Sunday-school prize book—*Robinson Crusoe*.

"These are my very own," said Sandy to herself, as she piled them together. "I've got to have a nightgown to sleep in, and I got to have clothes on to cover me, and the money is my own which Miss Perkins gave me, so I've a right to take them all.

THE FLIGHT

I'm leaving him all my other things, in case I should do wrong to take everything, since he is The Heir."

Although her mind was fully made up, she so longed for guidance of some kind that she opened the Bible at the very place marked by Miss Perkins' own hand, last Sunday's golden text: "Flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word."

Sandy read it solemnly aloud. It seemed to her that God and Miss Perkins had sent her a message.

"I don't know," she reasoned, "agzactly where Egypt 'll be for me, but I'll begin to flee, anyway."

The money clutched tightly in one hand, the bundle in the other, Sandy went softly out of the back door and down the back way to the next street.

Sandy needn't have been so careful. They had forgotten all about her in the next room. Once more land values had engrossed all their attention. Before The Neighbor had bethought him that he might "as well tell the child to go on over to the house and get a bite to eat" Sandy had reached the railway-station.

"I want a ticket to Newark," said Sandy.

"On the wrong line, Sissy. We don't go to Newark, but we do go to New York. Guess Mother meant you to go on the D., L. & W., didn't she?" inquired the station-agent, smiling at her.

He was the new man, Sandy saw, and didn't know her.

"No," Sandy answered, quickly. "I made a mistake, mister. Newark sounds so like New York. I want a ticket to New York."

"One way?" asked the agent.

"What does one way mean?"

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

"Are you coming back?"

"Oh no," said Sandy, promptly. "Never."

"Oh, the old town ain't so bad as all that," laughed the young man, as he took seventy-five cents of her precious money and returned her the ticket and the change.

"Don't lose the ticket, Sissy, and take care of your fortune. That's right," as Sandy tucked it in her pocketbook. Then, with a sudden misgiving, as he saw her exceeding smallness, "Some of your folks gonna meet you?"

"Oh yes," answered Sandy, confidently.

But to herself she said, quickly, "Oh, please God, that isn't a lie; I mean it. For if cats can find a good home and dogs can git themselves adopted, ain't you given a girl sense enough to nose out a few folks for herself?"

Sandy, aided by the magnificent conductor, who did not scorn to hold and then hand to her the brown-paper bundle, climbed aboard the New York train.

II

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SANDY had never been on a train before. There was so much to marvel at, to look at, inside, that at first she had scarcely time for the wondrous panorama that flew past the windows.

After having, with rapture and admiration, seen the conductor magnificently punching all the tickets, she breathlessly watched the daring and handsome brakeman hold tight to the rail of the steps and swing far out over the high embankment. All this just to kiss his hand to a girl in a brown frame house window! His sister, Sandy thought. How proud she must be of him! How jauntily he carried colored lanterns through the swaying train. Sandy knew that in his place she would surely have broken them against the seats. Then the dexterity with which he opened ventilators and lit the gas. For this was nearly twenty years ago, and the trains were lit by gas then, not electricity.

Altogether Sandy was so stirred and excited that she hardly gave a thought to herself or to the out of doors that was flying past every minute. Nevertheless, she had shrewdly gauged the people in the train, and decided that they were mostly men too busy with papers to bother with a little girl.

"Besides," Sandy assured herself, "they'll be less

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likely to bother with me on a train than if I spoke to them and asked them just as they had their hand on their own house door."

The only woman in the car with Sandy was a big fat woman, who fell asleep and snored, and was cross when the conductor woke her. Sandy decided firmly against her.

Now she began to gaze out the window and to become interested in the country that they went through, and to get very hungry.

The conductor had told her that New York was the last stop; not to get frightened going through the tunnel; and he, too, had asked her if her folks were going to meet her. Sandy had answered as before, with the same plea to God to make it come right.

She began to get hungrier and hungrier, and she had nothing to eat. She closed her eyes so that she might not think of it.

Sandy's seat was at the rear of the car, and finally the conductor seated himself behind her and began to count his tickets. To him came the brakeman. The conductor, who had been looking at Sandy, said, in his big, kind voice: "See here, Jim, if I'm busy when we get to Jersey City, keep an eye on that child, will you? Wake her up if she's asleep then, and see that she meets her folks, or get Mike, the big cop, to look after her till she gets safely on the ferry."

"A'right," replied Jim, cheerfully, as he sauntered on. "She's a cute little kid, and asks funny questions."

Sandy kept her eyes tight glued together, so that the kind conductor wouldn't know that she wasn't really asleep; but inside her she was terribly fright-

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ened. What if they told the big cop to watch her, and she didn't find her folks right away, and he put her in a station-house, and then they sent her back to "the House"?

Her heart almost stopped beating. After all this brave adventuring that would be too horrible. There was only one thing to do. At the next station, while the conductor was busy on one platform, she would get off the other, no matter where the train stopped. Maybe the country would be better than the city for searching for folks. While there wasn't so large a choice, there was more room than in the city; and, according to the talks she had had with Miss Perkins about it, New York was a pretty big place and dreadfully crowded.

After all she was a girl, and not a bold, enterprising boy, such as she had read of in Horatio Alger's *Phil the Fiddler* and *Paul the Peddler* in the Sunday-school library.

The train began to slow up. They were crossing a high trestle bridge over a beautiful big river, and then, after a few minutes, and while Sandy was still shuddering at the danger of it, they dived into the "cut." The train ran between two high walls of stone and dirt and then flashed out level with the street of a small town and slowed up at the station.

The conductor got up and went out on the platform. As he did so Sandy rose, too, grasped her bundle tightly under her arm and, as the fat woman rolled toward the door, got behind her. The conductor opened the door and called "Egypt! Egypt!"

Sandy felt a thrill as she heard the name. Surely here was a direct answer to prayer.

So screened by the fat woman that the conductor

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did not see her at all, Sandy went quickly down the aisle to the other door. Her friend, the smiling brakeman, was busy helping a pretty girl down. Sandy slipped down on the platform between two great clumsy Swede laborers before he could turn.

A big express truck laden with packages stood close by. Getting on the opposite side of that, Sandy saw she was free from the conductor's eagle eye. From there to the door of the waiting-room was so short a space that it needed only a careful watch to find a good opportunity to cross it.

With nerves stretched and tense, and the fear of "the House" before her, Sandy watched. Just as the conductor stooped to exchange conversation and big manila envelopes with the station-agent, and the brakeman turned to help on another entrancing girl—his world seemed full of them—Sandy skipped into the waiting-room.

She sat down on the bench nearest the door, cast her bundle beside her, and waited for the train to pull out.

It seemed a long while to her, but in reality it was only a minute or so. Sandy employed that time in looking at the street through the window.

It was an ordinary village street. First a big, ugly frame structure labeled "Old Egypt House," with an ugly saloon entrance, and still uglier gold-lettered sign; then a barber shop; then a grocery shop; then a vacant lot with a narrow, much-worn path across it, where commuters had made a "short cut" from the next street; then a small one-story building divided into two little shops. In the window of one half a big clock stood surrounded by many glittering things. This jeweler's shop was the

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half furthest away from Sandy. Of the other shop, that next the vacant lot, Sandy could make nothing.

Over the door was a small, blue-lettered sign proclaiming to everybody that this was the office of *The Sentinel*; but there were no wares displayed in the window, as far as Sandy's eyes could inform her. In the doorway stood a man, not very tall, but so erect as to give the impression of height, with the blackest hair and short-clipped beard Sandy had ever seen, and a pair of very broad, thick, black eyebrows, under which sparkled gray, smiling eyes.

All this Sandy was enabled to see, not because her eyesight was so marvelous, but because as the train gave a preliminary toot a woman came running down the short cut with a small boy and a bag. Quicker than Sandy would have believed possible, the black-haired man hurled himself out of the door, onto the path, grabbed up the boy and the bag, and shot along with them to the train.

The woman ran panting after him. The conductor dragged her up the steps. The dark man stopped her voluble thanks with a smiling wave of the hand, put her bag on board, and handed up the small boy. The train moved off. But not before Sandy had heard this wonder-working bit of conversation. As the conductor reached down and took the small boy from the smiling black-haired man he had shouted: "That's you every time, Chief! Always looking out for the kids."

To which the smiling man had replied: "Sure. Got six of my own at home—six of the finest—and always room for more."

Then he had waved his hand at the train and the conductor and gone striding back to his doorway,

LOOKING AFTER SANDY.

with a carriage of the head that oddly reminded you of drums and processions.

"Six of his own, and always room for more." God had spoken.

Sandy shouldered her bundle, or, rather, put it under her arm, and opened the door of the waiting-room. Blind to the beauties of the scrap of lawn with a flagpole in the middle, kept green and shrubby by the Ladies' Village Improvement Society, and known as Depot Park, Sandy set her face toward *The Sentinel* office, pausing once only; that was to interrogate a small boy who was feeding a weary horse hitched in front of the Old Egypt House's swing-door.

"Say," Sandy said, briefly, stretching a skinny arm toward *The Sentinel* office and the man who was disappearing through the doorway, "who's he?"

"Who's what?" questioned the boy, crossly.

"That man," said Sandy, in no way daunted by the ill will evinced by the boy as he hit the horse a resounding whack with his hand.

"That dark man who put the little boy in the train?"

"Oh, him?" answered the boy, with a quick glance around to see if the person under discussion was in sight and at the same time pretending to pat the horse. "He's the Chief, he is."

"Chief of what?" demanded Sandy, awful visions of police dancing through her head. Still the man wasn't in uniform. Ah, he might be a detective!

"Chief of our new fire company," said the boy, proudly. "Gee! you'd ought to see him in uniform on the truck."

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"And what's *The Sentinel*?" continued the relentless Sandy.

"*The Sentinel's* a newspaper," responded the boy, somewhat sullenly. "And now, Queen Victoria, unless you're going to ask me any more questions I'll get to work."

Sandy moved on in a semi-dazed condition. Surely a man who could run a newspaper, be chief of the fire department, and have six children *could* have room for *one* more.

The world was growing wider and broader under her very eyes. It was a nice place, anyway. Everybody was pretty good, and it had stopped raining. The sun had come out bright and shining. It shone on the glasses of a girl some two or three years older than Sandy herself, who sat in *The Sentinel* office on a high stool at a big desk and made marks on a paper.

"It won't come out even, Father," Sandy heard her say. "It's half a column too long."

"Then I'll have to cut it," the man replied, and took the paper from the girl's hand. "Run up to Brown's shop now, will you, Nancy, and see if he'll come down and help me out, and if he knows anything about old Wilks? It's Wilks' morning to set type, and he isn't here. I've got to get back to my own work."

"Yes, Father," agreed the other girl. "Then shall I go home to luncheon?"

"Oh yes, Nan," her father said, absently, "and tell Mother I'll be up myself presently."

The girl went up the street, passing Sandy at the door without a glance, so intent was she on keeping those glasses in place on her cute little tip-tilted nose, which was plainly never designed for them.

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"Nancy is a nice name," thought Sandy. "I wisht I knew her well enough to go home with her or to run errands."

Then she took a firmer grip on her bundle and entered the shop or office.

It was a funny bare little room with a stove in the middle and a high desk and stool at the end near the door. All the rest of the room was taken up with big racks filled with black bits of lead and a clumsy thing which Sandy afterward learned was a "form"; also that the black bits of lead were "type."

The Sentinel was not printed on the premises. The local news was simply "set up," the form locked and taken to the next town, where it was printed. The story part of the weekly, which the editor always alluded to as "the patent insides," was then added, and the whole sent, damp and inky, back to Egypt to be sorted, folded, and sold.

Deep in his editorial, which, alas, must be cut to fit space, The Chief never moved when Sandy entered. She waited awhile, politely; then shifted first one foot, then the other, and coughed; first mildly, then with a hollow, warning sound.

The Chief looked up and then down on the up-turned face, and inquired, facetiously: "What's this? Consumption?"

"No, sir," said Sandy, indignantly. "Perfectly healthy, though unattractive."

"What! What's this?" questioned The Chief, his sense of humor struggling with his natural kind-heartedness and understanding of children.

"It's me," Sandy announced, beautifully simple, though ungrammatical. "It's me and my clothes,

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and please, sir, if it's agreeable, I'd like to be the one more."

"One more what?" said the still puzzled man.

"You said it." Sandy glared fiercely up at him with two honest gray eyes. "You said it, and you can't go back on it. I heard it from the waiting-room. 'Six of my own, and always room for one more.'"

So saying, she laid her bundle down and faced him determinedly. Could the world be so dreadful that he would say he hadn't said it, or, if he admitted it, that he hadn't meant it? The little room was almost going around to Sandy when this thought entered her head. She grasped one leg of the high stool firmly and waited for the worst.

But the black-bearded man only threw back his head and laughed, and laughed. He had nice white teeth, and he showed a lot of them, but would he never stop? Apparently not. He would wipe the tears away and look down at her, and then go off again, and the laugh was neither low nor suppressed.

Sandy waited, politely smiling, whenever he stopped throwing back his head and looked at her. For some reason or other this only made the man laugh more.

Finally he held his sides, and then wiped his eyes a little longer than usual. Sandy, taking advantage of this pause, again caught his eye and, going to him, laid a timid hand on his knee as he sat on the high stool far above her.

"You did mean it, didn't you?"

The man looked down at her, suddenly sobered, as he glanced at the heavy-lidded eyes and the tired

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childish face. "Yes, my lassie, I meant it," he said.

"Then will I do?" asked Sandy, simply.

The staggered gentleman looked a moment undecided as to whether to laugh again or take her seriously. He finally decided on the latter course, and, patting her head, said, just as simply, "But I didn't mean that way. I meant—the usual way."

"What is the usual way?" asked inquisitive Sandy.

Once more the gentleman looked undecided whether to be amused or serious, and once again Sandy's directness won him, for he answered, quite as directly as herself: "Well, little babies, you know, —come from—God."

"I come from God, too," said Sandy.

The gentleman slipped from the stool and lifted Sandy up on it. And now he wasn't laughing in the very least; he bent kind gray eyes on her and said, as he laid her bundle on his desk and put his arm about her: "And that's very true. Now will you be telling me how it came He sent you"—and he glanced about the printing-office with a ghost of his old twinkle—"here?"

And Sandy, her red head against his shoulder, took up her tale.

III

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SANDY'S tale was soon told. After it had been heard in respectful silence the gentleman lifted her kindly and gently off the stool, took her bundle, and saying quietly, "We'll have to tell Mother," shut the door of the office and began striding up the street in a direction away from the station.

Sandy clutched his hand tightly. Everybody seemed to know him. If Sandy had been older she might have judged that she had chosen a man of singular independence for her protector, for, although many a curious glance was cast upon this odd child and her bulging bundle, no questions were asked; and The Chief volunteered no information.

Half-way up the street they met a small, nervous man with a long, straggling beard, at which he continuously plucked or combed it agitatedly with his fingers. He was hailed as "Brown," and given minute instructions and the key of the shop. He, too, though casting curious glances at the "young lady" with whom The Chief averred he was "hastening home," asked no questions.

After Brown had been dismissed they started along a pretty street shaded by big trees. On each side were neat little frame houses with gardens about them and wide back yards. Sandy admired them all, but was growing weary.

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Once her guide looked down at her and inquired if she was too tired to walk and wanted a "carry," but this she indignantly denied. Eleven years old, and to be carried before the other six! Perish the thought! She continued to plant one foot painfully before the other, and hope it wasn't for long.

It wasn't. Presently her companion, who had been adapting his step to hers and whistling and singing "Bonnie George Campbell" in the loveliest voice Sandy had ever heard, stopped before one of the cottages. Quite the nicest, Sandy decided. It was low and squatty, and only a story and a half high. It had white stones in front of the gate. On each side of the front of the house gigantic rose-bushes, one white and one red, climbed up to the shingles of the low roof. In the front the ground was laid out in flower beds, and the middle one was round with a fir-tree in the center. At the side was a grass-plot with rose-bushes in the middle, and a big "yellowbell" bush, no longer in bloom. Beyond that was a vegetable garden, a grape arbor, a big apple-tree, and at the foot of the yard a wooden shop with ladders and tools in it. This was always called "the Shop." Sandy had yet to learn that besides being "Chief," proprietor of *The Sentinel*, and the father of six, her new friend was a contractor and builder—when he had time and contracts.

A less youthful eye than Sandy's would have seen the simplicity and poverty of the whole scene. But it was smiling poverty, and Sandy—and indeed the owner himself—only saw the smile.

There was a box-like thing called the front porch—The Chief had not built his own house—but they

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did not go in there. They continued round the corner on the black cinder path, and there burst on Sandy the full glory of what the family called "The Out-Kitchen." It was a big frame kitchen about forty feet long, connected with the old cottage by a covered passageway.

The Chief opened the door in this passageway, and Sandy and he went along it to the kitchen. There was a steadily increasing murmur of voices as they came toward the kitchen door. The man stopped, his hand on the door, and looked into Sandy's white, exhausted little face.

"You'll find us a bit noisy at first, Sandy," he said; "but you'll soon get used to it. We're gay, you see. We may be as poor as Job's cat, but we're always gay."

"Yes, sir," answered Sandy, and the door opened.

It opened on a blaze of light and sunshine. The kitchen had dazzling white walls of plaster, with little windows set high up in the wall, through which streamed the noon sunshine, partly screened by dull curtains of red and brown. At one end of the kitchen was a big stove, and at the other end a sink and cupboards. At the farthest end—the stove end—were shelves holding china and books. In the middle, taking their time at their midday luncheon—for it was Saturday—around a big extension-table stretched to its limit, sat the six and their mother.

They were gay. Never had Sandy in all her short life looked into so many smiling eyes. Some dispute had been going on, and as the door opened there was a shout of "There's Father now! Ask him." Several small children arose and hurled themselves

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at the door, but on seeing Sandy and her bundle they stopped decorously and went back to their places. Sandy, taking the little chair The Chief drew from the wall for her, sat down and clasped her bundle.

Three pair of brown eyes, two pair of blue eyes, one of gray—all youthful—fixed the stranger with inquiring glances.

Then The Chief, who was looking at his wife, undecided how or where to begin, started to say something, and Mother's gentle brown eyes turned on Sandy, too, but without inquiry. As they looked they understood and accepted. Mother rose from her chair and said to the others:

"Move closer together, children." The move was made. "Nancy, will you put another plate down for—"

"Sandy," said Father.

"—and a knife and fork and spoon for Sandy," continued Mother. "Libbett," to a tiny, black-haired, important person, who was sedately trying to keep the baby from swallowing his spoon, "if you'll keep baby quiet I'll go in the sitting-room with Father a minute. You children will all be good to Sandy and give her some hot soup and bread and butter."

Then the astonished and grateful Sandy was taken by the hand and led to a place which appeared as if by magic among the many at the table.

"The child's fairly famished," announced Mother. "I can see that. You'll come to the front of the house now, Alec, and tell me as much as is necessary before you get your tea."

The Chief opened the door into the passageway.

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As his wife went out she turned her dainty head and called over her shoulder:

"Alan, you'll keep order."

The big blond young man at the top of the table laughed and nodded his head as the door closed, and he put out a hand to prevent the baby and Libbett descending in one congested mass to the floor. Geordie, from whom Libbett could bear anything, so dearly did she love him, had transferred his affections from the spoon to her curls, having discovered that by a firm grasp upon them he could raise himself to an almost standing position in the chair.

Libbett, released, was ordered to take Alan's place, while Alan promptly transferred himself next to Geordie. Geordie, delighted at his brother's nearness, made a grab at the close-cropped sunny hair, and, finding it wouldn't work, continued in a subdued murmur to sing into his silver mug and emerge from it every few seconds breathless, rosy, and milk-bespattered.

Nancy helped Sandy to hot soup and bread and butter, after a glance over her glasses at Alan, which clearly meant, "Isn't it like Father?"

Georgina, a pretty little brown pony of a girl, put a napkin in Sandy's hand. They all settled back in their places. Only nobody seemed to be able to do anything but eat and stare at Sandy.

"See here," Alan commanded, "talk, some of you, and about anything. Don't scare little Sandy stiff by watching every mouthful she eats. There's plenty for all. Why, you make me think of the billy-goat who swallowed the baseball-player."

"Tell it, Alan! Oh, tell it!" came in joyful ac-

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cents from Libbett, Georgina, and Phyllis, a round-faced cherub with a shock of goldy-brown hair. Georgie yelled "Alan!" and beat on the table with his spoon.

"To-morrow morning I'll tell it," Alan agreed, good-naturedly, "if you're all very good. To-day I must toil, though it's Saturday and all you lucky little beggars get free from school and can do what you like."

"Aw, Alan!" came protestingly from the tiny Libbett. "If you'd only seen the work Georgina and me's done to-day. Dusting and sweeping and beating rag carpet."

"And riding down-stairs on the broom, and making tents of the rag carpets, and playing Indians and things like that," said Nancy, cynically peering over her glasses.

"Haven't they dusted properly?" inquired Alan, tragically.

"We have! We have!" shrieked the frantic Libbett and Georgina across the table. "Oh, Nancy, don't be mean! We have."

"I'm informed," said Nancy, quietly, "that when Mother called these ladies for luncheon they were reading *Kidnapped*, and the parlor was still undusted."

"I did it ten minutes after. Oh, Nancy, don't be mean! We did do it, didn't we, Libbett?"

"Yes, we did; and don't you think Georgina did it all, either," almost screamed Libbett, her black curls bobbing as she rose to defend herself. "Georgina and me only read that book and forgot to dust because we thought there might be an 'Improve-the-Mind' game in it for us."

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"Fine excuses as usual," commented Nancy, looking at her elder brother in an assumption of equality, which sat oddly on her fourteen years.

Hastily bolting her mouthful of potato, Libbett continued her own and her sister's defense. "And we found one," she announced, triumphantly.

"One what?" said Alan, curiously.

"Improve-the-Mind game. It'll be useful to the others, too. You'll see. It's called 'Playing Pirates.'"

"How will that improve the mind or morals?" asked Alan, grinning.

"It will," persisted Libbett, firmly. "When we get through playing it none of these children," glaring fiercely at Phyllis and Geordie, "won't never even think of being pirates."

Just then the door opened, and Father and Mother entered the room and took their places.

The luncheon went gaily on, if a bit quieter in tone. Through it all, to Sandy's amazement, not the slightest question about her, or why she had come. Would God let her stay? Would He let her find folks so easy? Or must she go forth and begin the search again? Mother would decide, she knew.

By and by—though the luncheon was very simple, it was plentiful—she had eaten all the soup and rice-pudding she could manage. As the other little girls, with a "Please excuse me, Mother," were allowed to leave the room she looked up to find Mother's soft-brown eyes on her again.

"Please, ma'm," faltered Sandy, "may I be excused?"

"Yes, Sandy," said Mother; "but come here to

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me, my child. I'm a little short-sighted. I wish to see you clearly."

Sandy came over trembling a little, but looking frankly up into the sweet face, and then stammered:

"I'm a pretty good girl, even if I am unattractive."

"Unattractive!" Mother looked at her closely. "Who said that to you, Sandy?"

"The Heir," answered Sandy, candidly. "He said I was unattractive and I'd better be sent back to the House. They don't know anything about me, anyway. I'm a foundling, and stock is stock; so maybe you won't want me, either. But God made me, and Miss Perkins liked me."

"I'm sure of that," Mother answered, without looking up at either Alan or Nancy, the only children left in the room. The baby had been taken out by his faithful Libbett. "I find you very attractive, myself, and Father likes you. Now, suppose you run out with the other children. Nancy, tell Libbett to look after her and play with her, please."

"Do you mean I can play with your children—that I can stay here?" faltered Sandy.

Both Alan and Nancy wheeled about and looked at their Mother. Father put down his cup of tea and looked also.

"Would you like to?" asked Mother.

"It would be next best to going to Heaven with Miss Perkins."

"It's a very poor place, not the least like Heaven," said Mother, who disliked affectation and exaggeration.

"But you are all here," replied Sandy, simply.

Libbett, summoned by Nancy, had entered and stood waiting at the door.

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In the pause that ensued she thought about the precious minutes this girl was wasting from their Improve-the-Mind game that was going on in the back yard.

"Come on, Sandy," she urged. "What's your other name?"

"Sandison," said Sandy, faintly, her eyes fixed on Mother.

Mother started visibly. Alan came a few steps forward and put his hand on her shoulder; and Nancy, who was filling her father's tea-cup, set it down quickly.

"What's that?" The Chief said, abruptly. "What did you say your name was, Sandy?"

"Alexandria Victoria Sandison," repeated Sandy; then, sadly, "It's unattractive too, I s'pose?"

"Not to us, Sandy." And Alan suddenly smiled at her. "My name is Alan Sandison."

"That makes her our relation," said Libbett, excitedly. "Oh, Mother, say it does! I've always wanted a relation or something, and we haven't any over here in America. Let's imagine—"

"Here, Libbett," Mr. Sandison interrupted, "no imagining. Vamoose! Remove yourself and Sandy. Mother's thinking."

As the door closed on the two little figures Alan patted softly the shoulder nearest him. "It's all up with us now, isn't it? You'll never turn a Sandison from the door."

"She could help with the dishes, of course," Nancy sighed; "but where to put her—"

"There's always the chance, Alan," Mrs. Sandison reflected, "that she might be a SANDISON!"

"She's a nice little thing," Mr. Sandison said,

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nodding his head ruminatingly, "and there's always room—"

"Oh yes," interrupted Alan, quizzically. "You've so much money that you can't possibly use it all feeding and clothing your own."

"She could wash dishes, maybe," repeated Nancy; "but even so, it'll be another trouble for Mother, and she's got so much to do."

"If she stays," Mrs. Sandison said, softly, "she shall have the same advantages as the rest. Just exactly the same advantages."

"Well," sighed Alan, "you're the doctor, Mother. Only I beg you to remember the sailor, the peddler, the orphan boy, and the fifty-seventh degree Mason and all his offspring that one by one Father brought down upon our devoted heads. They have eaten our bread and stolen our clothes and small change and—"

"But this is a little girl, Alan," his Mother reminded him, wistfully, "and she's had such a hard time. It might have been one of your own little sisters."

"No, it mightn't," Alan said, quickly. "I'd see to that."

"But I don't want to make it hard for you two," Mrs. Sandison announced, looking first at the big son and then at her eldest daughter, who already had so many womanly cares on her shoulders.

"It's for you, Mother, that we mind," came from both her children simultaneously.

"Your great-uncle, William Sandison," said Mrs. Sandison, softly, "ran away as cabin-boy from Glasgow forty-nine years ago, and nothing was ever heard of him. He might have come to America

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and married, and it's barely possible this might be his granddaughter."

"It might," groaned Alan. "I don't think so; but even if it is or is not, shall a Sandison, a possible second cousin, be turned from her ancestral"—he looked about him with a smile—"kitchen? Never!"

Mr. Sandison winked at him.

"Well," said Mrs. Sandison, turning to her husband, who sat calmly absorbing tea with an expression of deep peace on his face, "the child must be properly looked after. Find out what you can about her, Alec, and—we'll see."

PART II

And he who gives a child a home
Builds palaces in Kingdom Come.

MASEFIELD.

IV

THE EGYPTIANS

SANDY'S advent naturally interested all that portion of Egypt which took an interest in the Sandisons, and that was just about the whole town.

In the daytime Egypt didn't look like a large town. The shops were few and small, and the place seemed half asleep, save when the children went to and from school.

But just watch Central Avenue when the 5.45 stopped at the station! It was black with commuters hurrying home to dinner and family. The same crowds might be seen in the morning, when the 8.10 left town bearing the wage-earners. Between these hours Egypt dozed; although lately it had acquired a factory, and now the sound of the factory whistle woke the street to activity again at noon. The employees were mostly women and girls, however, with a few half-grown youths and a great many husky Swede laborers.

Like most commuter towns, where the women see practically no one but themselves between trains, it was a gossipy little place, and nothing that happened escaped the eager eyes and tongues of those who watched and worked at home. Whatever they spread before their spouses when they came home was discussed in masculine fashion, but with equal

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minuteness, in the smokers of the 8.10 and 5.45, and new details brought home to willing ears.

Mr. Sandison knew his town, and was as politely indifferent to it as it was possible for a prominent citizen to be. Despite the fact, or it might have been because of the fact that Mr. Sandison was editor of the only town paper, gossip was "taboo" in the Sandison home.

"We have enough to do," the children were told, when they brought to Mother what they had heard, "taking care of our own affairs, without knowing too much about our neighbors'."

Dozens of times, in dozens of ways, was Mr. Sandison asked how he could manage to keep Sandy when he had so many girls of his own. He always laughed and said that Sandy was a gift worth much more than her keep. He never added that no one else wanted her, that The Heir had absolutely refused to do anything, and that Sandy's own townspeople washed their hands of her. Letters came and were read by Mr. Sandison without comment, and handed to Mother, who promptly looked them over and threw them into the fire.

"She was sent, Alec," was Mother's final comment. "We'll just look after her and keep her as one of us."

So Sandy stayed, and found out for herself day by day what being "one of us" meant.

It was wonderful—to Sandy. Not the less so that she discovered soon that what the Sandisons took for granted as the only thing to do was looked upon by the rest of the town as a very extraordinary thing—a ninth wonder.

Libbett took Sandy to school and told the teacher

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it was a new sister—Alexandria Sandison. Sandy faced long rows of well-dressed children. It was Egypt's boast that the town was so "nice" that every one could send their children to the public school. Everybody did, from the youngest hope of the Draytons, the oldest and richest family in Egypt, to the child of the poorest Swede laborer, six months over. The backbone of Egypt's day-laborer population was furnished by honest, hard-working Swedish peasantry.

Sandy looked her school-fellows over with the curious, unwinking look which then, as when she grew older, kept people from guessing what Sandy's mind was doing. She answered the teacher's questions quietly and without embarrassment. It was a very different thing when it came to answering the pertinent and impertinent questions of her school-mates at "recess."

Egypt was a small town and full of small people, and the struggle to do all your own work and keep up with those who did not, or to make one small servant do the work of three in the same effort to keep up appearances, tells terribly on the minds, manners, and customs of housewives and leaves little time for the cultivation of a wide Christian charity. Hearts that beat with envy at perceiving that Mrs. Davis had a new Persian rug, while we must keep the old velvet one for another winter, rarely beat in harmony with the larger charity and greater simplicity that marked the Sandisons' cheerful welcome to the waif. Of course, the children heard what their parents said—and knew what they thought. Children always do. "'Adopted' sister, you mean!" "She's really a poorhouse child."

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"Nobody's child." "Foundling" and "Charity child" were but a few of the mildest phrases that greeted Sandy.

It was treatment such as she had been accorded before, when Miss Perkins had first brought her home—a young savage from the County House—and she met it in the same way now, to gentle Libbett's horror.

At first Sandy had only looked in astonishment at her principal tormentor, Beatrice Bunn, a large blonde girl several years older, with skin like a peach and corn-colored hair. Beatrice and her brother, Clarence, a lanky youth of thirteen, had been plying her with rude questions for some time before Sandy's astonishment gave way to anger. Shaking off Libbett's hand, Sandy bent toward Clarence. Her thin right arm shot forward, and Sandy smote. There was a shriek from Clarence as he went down, and then—to the utter consternation of the horrified Libbett—Sandy sat on her prostrate foe and began to pound his head against the turf.

Before Libbett's loud and terrified sobs could penetrate the ears of the battle-flushed and triumphant Sandy one of the "big boys," who had seen the whole thing, came across the playground. He was two or three years older than Sandy, slim and tall for his age. He stooped over and lifted Sandy up. Libbett gasped, for it was Joe Drayton, and, while his family and looks were most refined, there were grave doubts as to Joe.

"Good work," he said to Sandy. "That was a fine little right-hander you soaked him. I like your pluck. But you'd better let me look after him."

Sandy looked at Joe, too impressed to speak, and

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with a careless, "Get up, Clarence, and get out of this," he led her tormentor away.

Sandy had turned to comfort Libbett, who was softly crying into a minute and speckless pocket handkerchief, when a pleasant-faced, English-looking lad with a wide, smiling mouth and a shock of fair hair touched her on the shoulder. He had crossed the playground with Joe, and was about Joe's age, but squarely and strongly built.

"That was a dandy—for a girl," he said. "You must have a muscle." Sandy stretched out her arm proudly. He felt it, judicially. "Pretty fair," he commented. "Feel that, though," and he stretched out his own arm. Sandy felt and cried out in admiration. It was as hard as iron.

The boy grinned. "If I had hit Clarence Bunn the way you did, right under the chin, he'd been out of business for a week," he said, not boastfully, but as one who stated a well-known fact. "Next time you've got a little job like that on hand holler for Tommy Wilks, and I'll look after you—and it. If I'm not around, why—hit this way."

He proceeded to demonstrate, and Sandy, watching eagerly, made several feeble attempts to imitate him. So engrossed did they become that it was only the bell that summoned them again to classes that made them both look up, embarrassed.

They were quite alone in the middle of the playground, back under the trees. Egypt only had one big brick school-house; but she had set it in the midst of a lovely field and the remains of a glorious beech and chestnut wood. Some distance away, near the steps, stood all the girls looking at them in horrified amusement. The new girl had fought!

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The new girl was talking to Tommy Wilks, Old Wilks-the-Printer's boy! Old Wilks was the town by-word for shiftless and inebriety.

Libbett felt it deeply, but to her honor be it spoken not one word did she say at home, and save for a gentle "Fighting isn't refined, Sandy," very little to the fighter.

"It probably ain't refined, Libbett," admitted Sandy, after due deliberation, "but it's awful useful."

Privately Sandy resolved to seek out her young professor and get further instructions. She did, with the final result that the three became firm friends, for who sought Joe found Tommy, and who sought Tommy must needs know Joe.

Tommy, despite his open scorn of Sandy's sex, taught her as much as her thin arms could execute. Joe looked on, with an occasional sarcastic remark, which Sandy took in good humor, knowing full well that should any dreadful emergency arise in which she could not hold her own these two boys would come to her rescue.

They did. Many times. Sandy took care not to let Libbett know how many, or the rest of the family guess how thorny were her paths and how sturdily she defended herself.

It was a curious trio—two of the so-called "worst" boys in the school, and one of the most sensitive and shrinking of little girls. For that is what Sandy was really, no matter how she was forced to disguise it. She fought because she must. She spoke boldly because she must.

Outwardly there was nothing between the three. At recess or assembly Joe never looked at Sandy,

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and Tommy openly disowned her. Although his father worked intermittently for The Chief, Tommy's proud spirit would not permit him for a moment to seem to be currying favor with any member of The Chief's household. Besides, his father's reputation was a sore spot in the boy's life. The town knew all old Wilks' failings, but only Tommy knew how hard the man struggled and how much it cost when he failed.

After school, however, and betweenwhiles they slipped their best picture-books to Sandy. Therein lay the real bond between them. Sandy, from her years of reading aloud to old Miss Perkins, had stored her mind with the best of the old writers, and knew how to retell the tales. The Greatest Reader now in a family of Great Readers, Sandy's repertoire daily grew larger, and the two boys lent their books to Sandy, and got them back with interest, especially Tommy, who was not a great reader. Joe was almost as great a reader as Sandy herself, but he had no one with whom he could talk about books. The other boys were ready enough for mischief, and there was plenty of it in Egypt; but Sandy alone, although several years younger, was Joe's intellectual peer.

Very dark they kept their friendship. It is possible that it would have been put an end to if Sandy's share had been known. Sandy, indeed, found it hard to explain to herself just why she liked these two vastly different boys, and, while she puzzled over it in her own mind, said nothing of it to Mother or Nancy, although she openly read the books and honestly told who had loaned them to her.

Never seeing her with the boys, Mrs. Sandison

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had no thought how much they meant to this strange little red-head she was mothering. If she had, though other mothers and fathers were loud in their distrust of Joe and readily laid the burden of all the tricks which their sons helped carry out on his unfortunate shoulders, it is doubtful whether Mrs. Sandison would have blamed Joe. She would have remembered that Joe had no mother and too much money; that an elder brother who was studying law at a distant college and a hired housekeeper are not apt to be all a growing boy needs.

So Sandy and Joe continued to be friends in a curious, antagonistic way, for Joe couldn't be used or fooled like the others. Joe saw through Sandy's tricks and manners and laughed at them, and called her funny names; but he liked her in spite of all. Sandy knew that without being told. To Libbett she confided that if any one ever told the full tale of Joe's alleged misdeeds at home, and she was forbidden to play with him, she would run away again. This wild thought so terrified the refined Libbett, who now regarded Sandy as some large, provoking, but infinitely precious plaything, that her lips were sealed.

The dreadful fact that Sandy fought, however, was revealed without Libbett's saying one word.

On that particular Saturday night, after an early supper, Mrs. Sandison took Geordie into the sitting-room to rock him to sleep. He only whimpered once or twice for his "Libbett-de," to tender-hearted Libbett's great relief.

All Geordie's short life he had been "dear" to everybody, and in the belief that it was the customary mode of address to those who comprised his

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family, he added a "de" to their names. Sandy could yet feel the thrill that went through her when Georgie first called her "Sandy-de."

He was very good to-night, and showed every intention of going immediately to sleep, and there was great relief among his little sisters, who were all his devoted slaves.

Alan went whistling to his room to make ready for choir practice, while Nancy, her nose screwed up harder than ever and her curly hair bushing out like a mop as she ran her fingers through it, took possession of the sitting-room table and lamp and began a softly muttered study of those swirls and strokes known as the "Phonetic alphabet" in *Pitman's Manual of Phonography*. The soft hum of "pe, be, te, de, chay, jay, kay, gay, etc.," went steadily on through "Mother-de's" soft lullaby.

Father had gone to *The Sentinel* office to see if the paper sales were up to the mark and to meet several of the town worthies. *The Sentinel* office was a favorite meeting-place for town politicians.

Then, having received from Father's own hand ere he set forth the magnificent sum of ten cents, with a penny added for Sandy because she had found his cane quickly for him, making eleven in all, the gallant Sandy, accompanied by the three younger sisters, proceeded down the street to Brown's store for the weekly candy.

It was a little later than usual, owing to the dish-water having taken so long to heat; but they had promised Mother to go quickly, and Sandy—well, wasn't Sandy big enough to take care of them all?

Sandy felt the responsibility. Before they left the yard she called á halt and arranged her small

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army in the best possible formation to rapidly and successfully resist some terrible enemy. Libbett found it difficult to believe that they were just the rough Swedish boys, who had always teased them, but who fairly persecuted Sandy, when alluded to under the shrilly whispered stigma of "that chuckle-headed Swede lot."

"Mind," said Sandy, darkly, "Father says don't distress Mother, whatever happens. Fathers understand about fighting. They know a fellow—a person has to defend herself and her sisters sometimes, and Alan showed me how to box," she added, grandly. "But Mothers always expect their daughters to be ladies and get distressed about fighting. Still, when a whole street is in— What was that word, Libbett?"

"Infestered," answered Libbett, promptly. Libbett had a passion for long words.

"When a whole street," continued Sandy, "is infestered with Swedes, and chuckleheads at that, girls have to fight. Long ago ladies fought. Queen Boadicea fought like anything. I've seen a picture of her. I never looked half as bad as that. That would have distressed Mother."

"Now, then, Libbett and me'll go together. Libbett nearest the fences, so that they won't see her at once. If Oxel Johnson starts in being funny, and I have to fasten on him," Sandy said, modestly, "I'll pass the ten cents to Libbett for safe-keeping, and Libbett 'll pass the penny she's carrying to Georgina, and both of you take a hold of Phyllis and run."

"What 'll you do?" inquired Libbett, excitedly.

"Punch him," answered Sandy, with an air of

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conscious rectitude and pride. "If they get behind and pinch your legs, Georgina," she further advised, "kick and run, but don't yell. Yelling isn't ladylike, and Mother says we must not lift our voices in the street."

"A'right," agreed Georgina. "Say, Sandy, don't let's have any black licorice shoestrings in the candy to-night."

"We'll see," said Sandy, judicially, "how many two-for-a-centers we get. If we get enough, we won't."

"I want a penny doll," murmured Phyllis, sweetly, but obstinately.

"You can't have it, Phylly," Sandy argued. "This is candy night, so stop wishing."

"But I want a penny doll," said Phyllis, swinging on Georgina's arm.

The small foraging party moved forward in order, and all went well for the first half of the way.

Libbett was just beginning to think that this must be only a false alarm or another of Sandy's marvelous imaginings when, with a whoop and a yell, a big, clumsy, flaxen-haired boy in rough clothes and with still rougher looks and shoes came running behind them.

A squeal from Georgina: "Sandy, he's pinching again!"

"Grab Phyllis and run. Libbett, take care of the money, but don't spend till I come!" shouted the warlike Sandy, as she dashed to the rear in a frenzy of movement and whirling arms.

It was a vain imitation of Alan's flail-like blows, but effective enough with the big, cowardly boy. By sheer quickness of movement the girl bewildered

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him and made the bully unable to stand ground, and his "Hare ban leedle red-head agen" was drowned in her triumphant, "Take that, you chuckle-head," as she tripped him up and began belaboring his prostrate form.

Libbett had dragged Phyllis away by main force. She was bloodthirstily demanding to be of use. "Want to poke him wif a stick!" she shrieked.

"Oh!" mourned Libbett to Georgina, as they fled along to the corner. "This is dreadful! It's not refined in the least."

"I don't know," said Georgina, doubtfully. "I thought Sandy went at him," she added, firmly, "in a very refined manner. A boy would have spit on his hands and said 'Gee!' at least."

Libbett shuddered. "I do think all the same," she sighed, "that it would be nice if we moved to a quieter street. I sometimes think"—and she sank her voice in horror at the thought—"that Sandy really enjoys it."

"She does," said Georgina, unexpectedly. "She just loves it. Says it scares her into a jelly, but she likes the feel of it—after."

"Oh, Georgina, Georgina!" mourned her scandalized sister. "Don't make up things."

"I ain't—I mean, I isn't. I mean I am not neither," said Georgina.

"Look back, look back, Georgina, please," implored Libbett, "and see what Sandy's doing! These Saturday night candy journeys are just wearing me out," she added, with a curiously old-fashioned imitation of her sister Nancy.

Georgina looked, and then in a dazed, horrified,

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yet triumphant voice she announced hesitatingly, "I—I think she's dancing on him."

"Then we can stop running and wait here," said Libbett, resignedly.

Suddenly the yells of the prostrate foe ceased, and as suddenly ceased Sandy's triumphant dance. It had been around, not on him. The little girls looked up the dim street to see the reason. Oxel had given a call for help, and running toward him and upon the lone Sandy were two other boys.

"Here," said the white-faced and tiny Libbett, bracing her thin shoulders bravely, "you hold the ten cents, Georgina; I gotto go and help."

"They'll break you in two," screamed Georgina. "You're so little. Here, Phylly, you hold the ten cents and the penny, and stay right here till we get back." And the four skinny little legs twinkled along the path to the rescue.

So hard were their hearts pounding and their legs twinkling that they were on the battle-field before they saw that help was no longer necessary. There stood Alan, their own splendid Alan, while before him cowered three miserable boys, one of whom was brushing Sandy's dusty shoes with his cap, the other pinning a rent in her apron, while the third was brushing dust from her skirt. All this under a fire of half-laughing criticism, much more terrible to the boyish soul than a sound thrashing.

"Now," Alan was saying, pleasantly, "since you have done all you can to make the lady comfortable, you will all three march down the street just in front of us, with your hats off, until you come to the corner. If any gay young fighter-of-girls thinks he

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can break step and run away, why, let him try it—that's all."

"Aw, Mr. Sandison," said one of the trio, "not all the way to the end of the street?"

"All the way," answered Alan, blithely, "and if you are not properly polite and careful it will be all the way into Central Avenue, and I'll make you give three cheers for Woman's Suffrage under the nearest street-lamp."

Without a word the boys, awed by his terrible strength and famous muscle, fell into step and marched gloomily before. Equally without a word, awed by his beauty and splendor, the four little girls closed round him and followed their hero's footsteps with proudly beating hearts.

Sandy's feelings almost suffocated her. Tears were in her eyes, and her ever-ready tongue was mute. Not in gratitude—she had barely had time to sense her danger before Alan had come to the rescue—but in sheer hero-worship and love. She would have liked to make a carpet of herself for Alan to walk on. There was nothing too great for her to do for him. She walked on clouds, imagining great things, and suddenly the hero of them brought her back to earth again.

"You're pretty handy with your fists, Redhead," he said; "but it isn't ladylike, and you'll have to stop it."

"He—pinched—he pinched Georgina's legs—" she stammered.

"He called us names," said loyal little Libbett.

"He was twice as big as she was, too," volunteered Georgina, timidly.

"Yes, I know; I know all that," said Alan, loudly,

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for the benefit of the boy himself in front, "and next time he meddles with you I'll give him all his father ought to have given him years ago, and then some more. Now, clear off, first begging these ladies' pardon. Nicely, now."

It was over at last, and they had turned back up the street, going slowly at first, and then breaking into a run, and for cover, with derisive yells.

"Alan"—and Sandy spoke with a trembling voice—"I can't help it. They'd make—chowder of me—and hurt the girls if I let up on them now. Besides," with a burst of anguish, "you showed me how."

"Just in fun," admitted Alan. "I never thought you'd have to use it so realistically." Then realizing, as the street-lamp shone on the anguished little face, that Sandy was feeling badly, he added, kindly: "I'm not blaming you, Reddy. It's only that it won't do. They might hurt you." Sandy grinned. "Oh yes, they might. It 'll have to stop."

"It won't never stop on this street, Alan," asserted the aristocratic Libbett, clinging to his hand. "It's getting very common. If Sandy's ever to get any peace we'll have to move."

"That's just what we're going to do. Good night, ladies." And with a princely bow he left them on the steps of Brown's shop, to stare after him, and then at each other.

"Going to move!"

Could it be true, or was Alan only fooling?

V

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"**W**HETHER he is or not," announced Sandy, judicially, as she surveyed the staring, open-mouthed band, and promptly resumed leadership, "what we've got to do right now is to get in and get that candy or we won't have any time for—"

Here she broke off abruptly, and, pursing her mouth up importantly, put her hand on the door-knob of Brown's candy and stationery store.

"Time for what?" asked Libbett, curiously, her little white hand placed over Sandy's larger and always grimmer one.

"You'll know—when we get back," whispered Sandy, and opened the door. Libbett clamored after her, forgetting to rush and press her face against the glass panes of the candy-counter, as usual.

"I'd rather know first," she said, breathlessly, clinging to Sandy, "than even choose the chocolate rats."

"I'll tell you first, anyway," replied Sandy, for once in her ambitious career realizing that here was fine and unswerving fidelity and loyalty that could go no further. "But, Libbett, you know what Georgina is; we couldn't trust her with the choosing. She'd let Phyllis get anything she wanted."

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"Well," sighed poor Libbett, whose extreme thinness Mrs. Sandison often attributed to her restless anxiety to do justice to all of her sisters at once and at all times. "What can you do when Phyllis'd just as soon as not make a terrible row-de-dow-dow right here in the store?"

"Be firm," muttered Sandy, and turned just in time to see the determined Phyllis advance on the thin, nervous little Mrs. Brown, who stood smiling at them, and saying:

"Well, young ones, what d'ye want?"

"A penny doll," demanded Phyllis, and slid across the extra penny.

Like a hawk Sandy fell upon it. "Excuse her, Mrs. Brown, for she's too little to know any better."

Phyllis suddenly stiffened her whole frame and fixed her mouth for the loud, rebellious yell which usually brought instant submission from even the grown-up.

Sandy bent down and hissed in her ear: "If you holler out, Phylly Sandison, then you don't get not a candy, not even a licorice string, and, more, you'll be sent to bed the minute we get back. Besides," as she saw symptoms of these awful threats failing, "you should think shame of yourself, for it's my penny. Yours is in the ten-cent piece."

Phyllis relaxed her form and her mouth. Under that invincible and not to be controverted argument, there was nothing else to do. Honesty was not a policy in the Sandison household, it was a creed. If that was not her cent, Phyllis knew it was hopeless.

But her eyes held Sandy's firmly as she climbed up on a little chair that stood at the side of the counter and leaned her plump self against the glass case.

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"Den I chooses first," she said, and jabbed her finger on the glass exactly above a dish of bright-red "jawbreakers."

"Three for a cent," murmured Sandy. "All right."

Just as Mrs. Brown reached a hand in for the "jawbreakers" the fickle Phyllis changed her mind, and in spite of her sisters' frantic expostulations began to hold out for a five-cent chocolate bar.

While they were all convincing her of the selfish monstrosity of this proceeding Sandy gazed about the shop.

It still seemed dazzlingly beautiful to her, and almost as wonderful as when she first entered it under the guidance of the careful Libbett. It had rows of magazines and papers on a string back of the candy-counter. Its windows were full of toys and picture-books. Pencils, pens, and pads were in neat piles behind the counters, and gold pens and drawing-materials were in the other glass case.

At the rear were two doors. One a plain, ordinary door through which Mrs. Brown had come in answer to the shop-bell's tinkle. The other door stood open, and the doorway was tastefully draped with a cheap lace curtain, which failed to conceal a number of little marble-topped tables and a sign, "Horton's Ice-Cream."

Sandy and Libbett, who had joined her, gazed long at this entrancing scene, and Libbett told Sandy the saga of "The time Alan treated us all to two plates, one right after the other. Chocolate and lemon mixed."

Libbett and she once more lifted "the paper-weight" from the stationery counter. It seemed to

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be just a heavy bit of glass with a bulge in the middle, until you lifted it up, and then, lo! in the middle of the glass there was a snow scene, and the snow fell softly all around the beautiful house until you laid the weight down again.

"It's always like that," sighed Libbett once more, in pure ecstasy, "and it's always been like that. You can turn it round ever so many times, but you can't see where they stuck the picture in or what makes the snow fall."

Phyllis interrupted them. Having exhausted the patience of Georgina, and even jerked from the meek Mrs. Brown the remark, "Yon's a set young one," she now descended from her perch and announced that she was "froo choosing." The moment their backs were turned she began making sly experiments with the paper-weight, such as dropping it on the floor, and then with a wet finger trying to remove the moon in the beautiful landscape.

Ordinarily Libbett would have been watching her, distressed and horrified, but to-night she and Georgina were concentrating their attention on the wider choice afforded Sandy by the extra penny; so Phyllis, after exhausting the paper-weight, strolled off to investigate the ice-cream parlor.

"A' course, Sandy," said Libbett, wistfully, "if we could afford it we'd each have one; but, being as there's so many of us, and ten cents isn't so awful much, after all, don't"—here she endeavored to make the request as delicate as possible—"don't poke at the five or three cent chocolate bars."

"No, indeedy!" responded Sandy, so promptly and so evidently horrified at the thought that Georgina, who had been hanging back to watch the

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more diplomatic Libbett's tactics, breathed a sigh of relief. Georgina, always a little sparing of words, with a little sideling rub against Sandy's shoulder, now volunteered the information that "The pink rats is—"

"Are," said Libbett.

"The pink rats are," continued Georgina, tossing her pony mane, "not never so good tasting as the choc'lat' ones. The pink licks off, and it's white underneath," she warned under her breath, lest Mrs. Brown hear and be hurt at this attack on her goods.

"Mother is distressed—awfully distressed—if we bring home chewing-gum, even by mistake, remember," Libbett reminded Sandy; "but chocolate rats is very good. I mean nice. Chocolate buttons, though, you get three for a cent. They are ver-ry, ex-tremely nice."

Sandy poked at them, and at a peculiarly delightful sort of stickiness known as "cocoanut dabs," and then stood by to let Georgina take her turn. After that Libbett made careful and deliberate selection, and just as she stepped from the little chair there came a wailing cry, followed by a thud from the ice-cream parlor.

A rapid rush to the rescue by all the party, and a "Save us and bless us" from the distracted Mrs. Brown, who dashed before them, resulted in the discovery of Phyllis, with her head in the oval swirl which formed the back of one of the exceedingly ornate chairs flanking the ice-cream tables. She had gotten it in. She could not get it out.

After a while the united efforts of Mrs. Brown and Sandy wrenched her free, disheveled and sobbing, only to be comforted by one of the precious choco-

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late rats. Finally the store door clanged behind them, leaving Mrs. Brown to sigh with relief and mentally thank her stars that "they Sandison girls came when trade was slack."

Outside Sandy darkly regarded the sobbing Phyllis as she nibbled the nose off the chocolate rat, and tried to explain at the same time to Libbett between bites and sobs how, "My head flew froo, and it grabbed me, an' it wouldn't leggo."

"And when she gets home she'll want her full share, as usual, and her eating part of it now," Sandy said, bitterly, to Libbett.

Libbett shook her head. It was pretty hard, but what could you do?

"Phyllis and Georgina, you walk together in back of us," ordered Sandy, clasping the paper bag rather too closely to her heart for the good of the chocolate buttons. They had a tendency to cling to each other or anything else in the bag. "I'll walk ahead with Libbett and explain what we're going to do to-night."

Evidently it was something very exciting, for Libbett gave little squeals of excitement and danced up and down, saying: "Oh, Sandy, will you? Oh, lovely! Oh, goody me!"

They drew near the corner of their own street. Phyllis had been steadily relating her woes to Georgina. They always began with "An' I stuck my head froo," or "And I jumped down and the bad thing caught me," or "hit me"; while Georgina at every pause in the narrative politely inquired: "Phyllis, when I'm a lady and wear a pink dress with pink hair-ribbons, what 'll you wear?" The color of the dress and the ribbons changed every few

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steps. Suddenly Georgina paused and called out in a tremulous voice:

"Will they fly out at us now, Sandy?"

Sandy stopped and looked back at her. "Will who fly at us, Georgy?"

"The chuckling Swedes," said Phyllis.

"Oh no," answered Sandy, confidently and fearlessly; "not so soon again."

"But Alan isn't here," objected Georgina.

"No, but Tommy Wilks is," answered Sandy, and nodded ahead to where in the gloom that gentleman was footing it briskly on the corner, singing and whistling in time to his rough jig.

"Hold the bag, Libbett; I'm going to run ahead and speak to him."

"Oh, Sandy," said the shocked Libbett, "he's old Wilks' boy!"

"And old Wilks gives Father lots of trouble, and he drinks beer, and Tommy gets sent home from school," began Georgina, wishful to add the latest to the sensational history.

"Well, Tommy don't drink beer," Sandy answered, depositing the bag in the limp hands of Libbett, "and he went out of school just as brave as brave, though he told me his father said he'd skin him alive if he got sent home again by that horrid old snoopy Professor Skelly."

"Did he get skinned?" Phyllis inquired, eagerly.

"That's what I'm going to find out," said Sandy.

"But Mother—" began Libbett.

"Mother says be nice to everybody," quoted Sandy, and flew down the path to the dancing figure, leaving her disturbed companions to follow in a more leisurely fashion.

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"He's a quite common boy," said Libbett, "and I don't know that Mother will like it."

"Mother does like him," unexpectedly declared Georgina. "Yesterday she gave him a red rose off the big bush."

"Yes, she did, too," crooned Phyllis, "and I gived him a—"

"Shish," ordered Libbett, for they were upon them.

"Tommy," announced Sandy, triumphantly, as she turned to greet them, "is going to walk all the way up to our gate with us to punch the snoot of Oxel if he comes."

"Sure," said Tommy, grinning. "Got nothing else to do," he added.

"He wasn't skinned," Sandy assured the girls.

"Oh, goody!" politely murmured the humane but scandalized Libbett.

"Nope. Dad just warmed me up a little. Say, Sandy," Tommy remarked, as they proceeded on their homeward journey, "after he got through, and got cooled down, he give me a new pitcher-book. I'll bring it to school a' Monday for you to look at."

"Oh, will you?" enthused Sandy. "Then I'll bring you my *Robinson Crusoe*."

"Oh, shucks! I don't want it."

"If I slip it to you recess?" insinuated the shrewd Sandy.

"No, you won't!" said Tommy, indignantly. "I don't want the other fellows catching on."

"Then I'll pull out a loose tooth in geography class," announced Sandy, firmly, "and you come out and meet me on the stone steps."

"A'right," answered Tommy. "Say, I wish't

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them chuckleheads would turn out. Tell me over again what your big brother did to them."

To the oft-repeated praises of "our brother Alan," and Tommy's companion story of how "My Dad onct held up two robbers with an ol' corn-cob pipe, them thinking it was a pistol," they went up the street. Tommy's story shocked and mystified, and was not in the least understood by the children; but as Tommy told it it was very thrilling.

At the gate Sandy, after a terrible struggle and mental calculation, over which the Sandison liberal-ity of spirit finally triumphed, handed Tommy a "cocoanut dab."

"It 'll make us one short," she sighed, as she closed the gate and Tommy went running down the street, "but it was worth it. Tommy's one of the best fighters in town," she explained to Libbett, "and even if his father does drink beer Tommy's a noble protector, and he's got lovely picture-books."

When they got in Mrs. Sandison was waiting for them in the kitchen, as were four brimming big wash-tubs full of hot, soapy water. There were no "real" bath-tubs in that cottage. There were also several buckets of hot water without soap, towels, and night-gowns for all.

After Mrs. Sandison had been given minute descriptions of Phyllis' adventure, and everything else except the fighting, which was merely alluded to as "and some boys were getting horrid and then Alan came along and," the candy was equally and impartially distributed, and Mrs. Sandison and Nancy almost tearfully besought to take their pick.

They were all kissed "good night," and the door closed upon Mrs. Sandison and Nancy, after minute

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cautions about the lamps and the fire. Then, all four "by their lonesomes" at last, Sandy jerked off Phyllis' boots with a practised hand, sang out, "All aboard for Long Branch," and the famous Improve-the-Mind game of "Ladies at Long Branch" began.

Presently, Libbett aiding the impatient Georgina, they were all undressed and in their respective tubs, and, swimming and splashing, they began in good style their stay at the seashore.

Libbett had once spent a week, with one of her mother's friends, at this wondrous summer resort, and from her descriptions and Sandy's vivid imagining this wondrous game had been built up.

In vain did Phyllis and Georgina forget themselves and play "w'ales"; decorously and sedately the others conversed on ladylike topics. When all the soil that could be detected had been removed, warm and cozy in their long nightgowns, they trailed about on the strip of rag carpet representing the beach, and with several old umbrellas and canes gave fair representations of ladies talking about their houses, children, and clothes.

Just as Phyllis began to yawn and look sleepy Sandy, with a glance at her faithful lieutenant Libbett, hustled them all to the end of the room, where, near the stove, three chairs were waiting the great business of the evening.

"Children," she began, staring at them solemnly, "we're going to have something special. Me and Libbett," she said, grandly taking Libbett into the scheme of things, "arranged it."

"Yes; oh, Georgina," twittered Libbett, "don't go to sleep!"

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"I ain't," said Georgina, more forcibly than elegantly. "I only just winked my eyes together."

"Just winked eyes," repeated Phyllis, her head sinking on Georgina's shoulder. Libbett propped her up, and in agonized whispers implored her not to spoil everything.

"It's a problem play," said Sandy, realizing with true dramatic instinct that now or never she must hold and interest her audience. "All about a baby, Phyllis, and a house afire, Georgina," she added, insinuatingly.

Instantly Georgina stopped "winking eyes," and Phyllis shook off sleep to inquire eagerly:

"Nigger baby?"

"No," announced the author-actor-manager, "a little teeny white baby, littler than our Geordie."

"Talk?" inquired Phyllis.

"Nope; just goo. Well, the lady's out on the prairie. The name of this piece is 'The Prairie's on Fire.' A prairie"—quickly seeing the question in Georgina's unwinking eyes—"is like the big meadows, only bigger. The meadows where Drake's moo-cows feed.

"And the lady's husband is out digging on those prairies, and the lady's home in the house singing the baby to sleep.

"Over here where I'm standing is the prairie; over here where I've just jumped to now is where the house is; and the brook is where I'm standing now—right on this board.

"Well, the lady puts the baby to sleep." Sandy laid an imaginary baby in an imaginary cradle and covered it up.

"She goes out to stand in the back doorway and

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see if her husband's working fast enough. She sees some smoke. She looks again." All this was followed by appropriate action.

"Now she knows what it is. 'Tis the Prairie on Fire.' She runs and tells her husband, and he runs and tells her to get the baby; but when she starts for the house her husband falls down, flop. He's swallowed too much smoke. She runs to him, but he won't get up. He's fainted or something.

"Now she's got to make up her mind which to save—her husband or the baby."

"The baby!" yelled Phyllis and Libbett together.

"Both of them, one in each hand," advised the cautious Georgina. "She could do it."

"She can't!" screamed back the author-actor-manager. "He's a big man, bigger than Daddy."

"Oh, dear, oh dear!" wailed Libbett.

"Now," said Sandy, glaring at them. "Hush! I'm going to act."

And she did, with frantic rushes between the house and the prairie, and wailings of "My husband! My husband!" and "My baby! My baby!"

The spectators, all fully aroused now, frantically aided her in the yelling.

Finally, with a terrible wail, the lady left the baby in the house and, dragging her husband's prostrate body to the creek, fell in with it.

Overcome by her own emotion and thoroughly exhausted by the triple performance of husband, baby, and wife, Sandy lay in a pretended faint, with one eye open to watch the effect.

Libbett was in tears. Georgina, sobbing also, was shrieking: "Could 'a' saved 'em both. One in each hand."

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"Don't want burned baby!" wailed Phyllis.

"Oh, dear," sniffed Libbett, "it's lovely, but it's frightfully, ex-tremely sorrow-ful."

"Oh yes," cried Georgina, "and it was such a cute baby."

Sandy had done an excellent imitation of Geordie.

"Couldn't it end differently, Sandy? Couldn't she take the baby, too?"

Wrathfully, but triumphantly, Sandy raised herself and surveyed her audience.

"No," she thundered. "It couldn't. This Saturday night she saved the husband. Next Saturday night she'll save the baby. But never no night will she save both of them. It's a problem play, like Father talks about."

Then, as she slowly rose from the floor and faced her astounded audience, Mother called from the sitting-room that it was nine o'clock.

VI

NEIGHBORS

THAT Sandy was responsible for the new house seemed wonderful to her, but, as Mrs. Sandison said, she was the means "under Providence" of bringing it about.

Lenny Martin, carrying Nancy's school-books home for her, had met Sandy and learned from her own lips, not from any of the Sandisons, how she had come "home."

Now Lenny's uncle, old Mr. Martin, was a banker, and held much of the wealth of Egypt in his thin old hands. He listened to the boy's story with a shake of the head, and began a long dissertation on the evils of taking strangers into one's home, and the improvidence of adding to one's expenses when not adding to one's income.

To all this Leonard, a dreamy-eyed boy of sixteen or seventeen, paid little attention; but finally, when his uncle had reached a point of delicate sarcasm as to where and how Mr. Sandison packed his family away in that soap-box of a house, Leonard looked at him over his tea-cup a moment and then set it down gently and said, fixing his uncle with his wide-open blue eyes:

"Why don't you sell him the Toms house, then?"

His uncle looked at him in amazement. But that

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he had not burst out in irritation or objection was quite enough for Lenny, who went on:

"It hasn't been rented for over a year now. It's too big for most people, that's why. It would be just right for the Sandisons, though, and then we would have neighbors."

After he had said this he looked shyly at his only relative, who took such care of his physical welfare, but who was utterly unaware, apparently, that a boy wanted anything except food and clothing.

"Neighbors," repeated his uncle, gazing at him from under his shaggy gray eyebrows. "What do we want of neighbors?"

"Well, I don't know about you, sir," answered Leonard, resolutely, for once in his life determined to stand by his guns and not shake and shiver every time this sarcastic old gentleman turned his cold, steely eyes on him. "But as far as I am concerned, it would be rather nice to have a few people within hailing distance. Now that the Toms house isn't occupied we are a mile and a half from everybody, and that isn't quite safe."

His uncle shrugged his shoulder.

"At any rate," Leonard added, "I should think you would be glad to have some one to talk to in the evenings."

"Ah," said his uncle, with finished sarcasm, "so that has occurred to you at last. "And then the long-delayed lecture on Leonard's staying downtown too late and the ingratitude and wrong-doing of the entire present generation began, as it did each evening regularly, whenever an opening appealed to Mr. Martin.

Between his orphan nephew and himself there

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seemed to be nothing in common; neither in books nor people nor life were their tastes similar. Leonard went through life accepting without question, admiring, appreciating whatever seemed good in his eyes. His uncle went through life testing and appraising, with seldom a word of praise, always a ready hint of censure. Besides, Leonard wanted to paint, to be a great artist, to devote himself to study, and his uncle wanted him to be a banker.

Small wonder, then, that there was frequent diversity of opinion and dissension in the great, comfortable house of Banker Martin on Rensselaer Road.

Though he rated his nephew soundly for the thought, Mr. Martin turned the Toms house idea over in his mind and discovered that for once he could agree with the boy, that there were some good points in the suggestion.

In the first place, the Toms house, a great, old-fashioned white farm-house, set in a grove of trees just below the Martin place, was getting out of repair standing empty. Low rent was better than none. In the second place, Mr. Sandison was undoubtedly a popular and entertaining man, who, whether he had money or not, had any number of friends and was always willing to "do" for them.

To do such a man a favor was, in the eyes of the calculating banker, well worth while, especially with *The Sentinel* in the background.

For Mr. Martin could not understand and would not have believed that Mr. Sandison never thought of using his popularity or his newspaper as a means to further personal ends. In short, if Mr. Sandison had been asked what he was in the newspaper busi-

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ness for he would have answered honestly, either "for fun" or "to keep old Wilks from starving."

It was rather expensive fun for the father of six, but it was good for the town to have a newspaper; an honest newspaper. It needed one. Therefore Mr. Sandison persuaded himself that it was his duty to give it to the town, even though it took up nearly all his time and barely paid its own expenses.

Saying nothing to Leonard about his intentions, next morning Mr. Martin appeared at *The Sentinel* office. Mr. Sandison greeted him cordially and handed him one of the few chairs, mentally wishing the old dry-as-dust would get his business over and go quickly. Mr. Sandison had a lot of local news to get into shape, and what on earth did old Martin want of *him*, anyway?

"So you have taken another responsibility on your hands, Sandison," Mr. Martin said, slowly.

"Another responsibility?" repeated Mr. Sandison, his mind on his work.

"Yes," said Mr. Martin, "another girl on your hands. Another child to feed, and you with six."

"Oh, that!" And Mr. Sandison lifted his bushy eyebrows. "That's all right. The more the merrier, and—I'm not asking you to help support her, Mr. Martin," he added, coldly.

"Just so. Of course not," jerked Mr. Martin, hastily, realizing that this was not Leonard or one of his hard-worked clerks, who had to stand being browbeaten; but, on the contrary, a man who looked as though he would enjoy doing a little browbeating himself.

"But I have been thinking that you might like

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to have more room than you have in your—ah—present house, Mr. Sandison,” he went on, suavely.

“We do very well as we are,” growled Mr. Sandison, in no mood to discuss his affairs with The Moneyed Man of the town.

“But I have been wondering,” persisted Mr. Martin, the more eager as Mr. Sandison showed no disposition to be charmed by his forethought, “whether you would not like to get a chance at the Toms house?”

Mr. Sandison lifted his head and looked at him. How did that old Money-bag know that the Toms house, with its stately trees and big old-fashioned rooms, had been one of his dreams for years?

“We could make some arrangement whereby I would take over your old house as part payment, and you could pay interest on the rest of the mortgage at such a rate that it would practically only amount to a moderate rent, with the privilege, of course, of reducing the principal when you could.”

Here Mr. Sandison, now thoroughly roused, began to talk “practically,” with the result that he closed *The Sentinel* office and went home to have another and longer talk with Mrs. Sandison; then Alan and Nancy were admitted to the council, and then the rest were told.

Great was the excitement and many the discussions that followed. The house was planned and replanned from cellar to garret. Sandy, as a great treat, took Libbett and Georgina to see it after school; and as she gazed at its magnificence felt suddenly very regretful that they were to leave the dear old house she had grown to love.

Sandy even went so far as to refuse to say that

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the big bedroom, which she shared with Libbett and Georgina, was "horrid," because it had a sloping roof. Was there not a wonderful game called Cooling the Feet, which consisted in placing one's feet against the aforesaid sloping roof while lying peacefully on one's back in bed, after having either drawn lots for or climbed over two sisters to get at the desired spot nearest the wall? Such a game no one with a stylish high-ceilinged room could play.

Besides, in such a grand new house would they still want her? Any lingering doubts she had as to this were set at rest when Mr. Sandison emphatically announced that "Sandy's brought luck with her," and as their "Lucky Sandy" she was once more accepted and welcomed.

Relieved, she drew for the other children wonderful ground plans of the Toms house under its new name of "Meadowbanks." These drawings, painstakingly done, showed the big hall which ran directly through the house, dividing it in two, the back door opposite the front. It was a wide, spacious hall, and from it went up a lovely old stairway with a "twisty-turny" rail and wonderfully carved newel-posts. "Mahogany," Alan had said, after he had been up and critically examined them. "They did things up in style when that house was built."

Alan proceeded to elaborate Sandy's plans and show the room on the left side of the hall in its proper dimensions. It was an immense reception-room, or "drawing-room," as Nancy insisted on calling it, fifty feet long, with wide French windows and a big fireplace. On the other side of the hall were two large rooms, a sitting-room and a dining-

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room, and the kitchen was an extension on that side of the house opening out from the dining-room.

Up-stairs were Mother's room, Alan's room, Nancy's room, Sandy's and Libbett's room, Georgina's and Phyllis' room, and an extra bedroom which Mother said was to be the guest-room. There was a queer little "L"-shaped room at the head of the stairs which Father "whacked" on for his own particular den. There was likewise a glorious attic.

Altogether it was, as Libbett complacently remarked, "just the kind of house for our family," and, though it took weeks to get ready for the moving, at last the eventful day did come.

Sandy went on the first load, sitting beside the driver, while in a rocking-chair strapped tight to the back of the wagon sat Libbett, trying not to look too conscious of the fact that at last her dream was being realized. She was leaving this common street.

The street looked uncommonly pretty, and Sandy from her high perch felt that; also a sudden sense of loss as she descried her enemy, Oxel, and in reply to his "Good-by, leedle Redhead," had responded with dignity, "Chase yourself, Chuckle," then lapsed again into the dream which he had interrupted.

In this dream many years had gone by, and a slight young woman clad in black velvet, with lilies at her bosom, was looking down this street, murmuring, "My old home! How changed!" This same young woman sang in the church choir—Presbyterian, of course. If you were "in it," meaning Egypt's Best Society, you went to the Presbyterian Church. Her voice was heartrendingly beautiful. She gave money to the poor; also to the church and

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other worthy institutions, and patted the heads of small children kindly, saying sadly: "Ah, I knew your fathers and mothers when I was a little girl." Then the sad young person vanished, taking with her her broken heart. Her lover, of course, had gone to the wars and been killed.

Sandy was sniffing audibly over these coming sorrows when Libbett broke into the dream by saying: "Hey, Sandy, look at Tommy Wilks!"

Tommy, standing in the sunlit road, looked wistfully at them.

"Ah, let him get up with us," Sandy begged the driver. "He's awful strong, and will be a real help to you."

"Sandy," screamed Libbett, from her regal seat behind, "there isn't room!"

"He can climb up and hold the horses while I go in and—get a match," said the driver, hastily getting down just in front of Old Egypt House and hurrying through the doorway.

Tommy climbed to his seat and held the reins. He seemed a bit cast down at their going so far away, but not too much. Conversation did not languish, and presently Tommy had gotten so far as to state that soon he was going to set up in some business or other, become very rich, and in the years to come he would return to the town in a carriage driven by two "chuckling Swedes." He frankly intimated that there would be a place at his side for either one of these fair ladies who would consent to be his bride.

Sandy put aside the offer firmly as "silly"; but Libbett, although deeply scandalized, feared the boy's feelings would be hurt, so gently intimated

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that when the day came it would be time enough to decide, and that anyway she knew he liked Sandy best. To which Tommy gallantly replied that he did just now, but who could tell whether he would in the years to come, and she had red hair, anyhow.

Just as Libbett called out "shish" the driver, carefully wiping his mustache, appeared on the steps of Old Egypt House without a match. The wagon went on, still with the optimistic Tommy, who had managed to find a place for himself on the driver's foot-rest.

Across the tracks they drove, past the watch factory, and on up the Rensselaer Road, which was the oldest road in the county, and had been built by a branch of the old Rensselaer family long before the Revolution, when they brought the first mining machinery into America and opened their great mine.

Sandy and Libbett, twittering like birds, reminded their less well-informed companions that it was down this road the redcoats marched on their way to New York. It was a rough old road on the highest part of the ridge which separated the town from the Salt Meadows. The ground fell sharply away from the road on one side, and at the foot of the little hillock lay the wide Salt Meadows, stretching onward to the distant city.

Beautiful color they were just now, lovely greens with the pink of the marshmallows and the brown of the cattails. The wind swept the grasses gently, and they murmured and swayed until they looked like the waves of some deep, green lake. Away in the distance was a little hill with a lot of red-brick buildings on it, so far away that they only looked

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like groups of children's building-blocks. That was Crow Hill, where the penitentiary and the insane asylum were.

All along the way were quaint old houses and farms, and pear and apple trees; and once, when the driver stopped to fix his traces, Tommy slipped through a fence and returned laden with delicious tomatoes, of which they all partook freely. Libbett had some qualms until Tommy assured her that *if* the farmer had seen him he would have given him more, because he knew his (Tommy's) father. After this Libbett ate with enthusiasm, for who could doubt that they were honestly come by?

Finally the heavily laden wagon drew near to a big white house set in the midst of grass and trees, with a brook in the rear, and a circular drive leading up to the big white piazza, which was all hung with wistaria vine. The horses began to turn in, and Sandy leaned over the driver's knee and touched Tommy's shoulder as, thrilled with the thought, she whispered, "This is our house."

They turned their heads to look for Libbett, and share with her this first delicious feeling of ownership, but the rocking-chair was empty. Libbett was gone!

Shrieking together in amazement, the two finally made the driver understand, and then the wagon was halted. Tommy and Sandy scrambled down and began running back along the drive. Sandy held back her tears by main force, for Tommy was there, and besides, if she cried she couldn't holler "Libbett" so loud.

As they left their own drive and struck the high-road they could see in front of them nothing that

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faintly resembled Libbett. Coming up the road some distance away was a carriage drawn by a pair of brown horses.

"That's Mister Martin's turnout," said Tommy. "Guess I'll duck in here among the bushes while you ask him if he's seen anything of her. He's sore on me," he explained, "ever since I accidentally threw a stone which accidentally went through his bank window."

"Oh, don't leave me, Tommy!" wailed Sandy. "You're our only protector, and he's forgotten it by now, I guess." Then, as she saw the boy hesitate, as suddenly she changed her mind. "Oh, I don't care whether you come or not. If you like to ride on our wagon and then run off when I've got a sister lost off the end of it, why, you can," she said, fiercely, and started on alone.

Tommy gave one look at the approaching chariot, set his mouth, and came along. Sandy paid no attention to him, and Tommy elaborately ignored her. It was to the whole world that he confided such suspicions as "There's a big blue speck on the side of the road there. Maybe that's Libbett." But an eager run to the spot showed nothing but a piece of blue overhauls stuck on a berry-bush. No Libbett.

By this time Martin's carriage was within hailing-distance, and Sandy, with a disdainful look at Tommy, stepped into the road and hailed it. Tommy as resolutely stepped to her side and held up his hand though the hand shook.

"Well, well," said Mr. Martin, from the body of the carriage as his coachman pulled up, "what's all this?"

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"Libbett," stammered the overwrought Sandy. "Have you seen her?"

"Li'l girl. Her sister," explained Tommy, with a would-be indifferent air. "Lost her out of the back of the wagon."

"Very careless of you, I must say," snorted old Mr. Martin. "Drive on, Tom."

"Please," said Sandy, firmly, "you can't go on until you tell us, for we won't move, and you dassent run over us. Didn't you see anything of our Libbett on the road, or anything?"

"Held up on the road, am I?" growled Mr. Martin. "And by whom, I should like to know? You're that young Wilks who broke my window—" Tommy slid round the other side of the carriage wheel. "But who's this who says I can't go on?"

"Sandy," answered that young person, without meekness, "and I was sent ahead with the first load as the most responsible next to Nancy, and now Libbett's lost—"

"I don't think much of your responsibility," snapped the old man. "People who can lose a little girl out of the back of a wagon half a mile down the road without noticing it—"

"Then you did see her?" said the quick-witted Sandy, and she climbed on the wheel, so far forgetting herself as to double up her fist at him. "Oh, you, did you leave our Libbett in the middle of the road in the dust?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Martin. "You did. Now, if you will be so kind as to get down, my horses—"

"She's in there!" came with a whoop from Tommy, who, mounting the other wheel, had been quietly

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examining the interior of the carriage. "She's in there! He's kidnapping her!"

A suppressed giggle came from the carriage robe, which Mr. Martin had held a little higher than would seem to be quite comfortable or customary, and at Tommy's declaration, and the determined dash upon the carriage made by the belligerent Sandy and Tommy, Libbett's curly head appeared above the robe.

"He ain't not neither," she said, concisely. "He's our next-door neighbor. He picked me up when you went on without me."

"Aw, why didn't you holler?" asked Tommy, himself again now that the lost was found.

"I did, but you didn't hear. This is Lenny's uncle," she further volunteered, "and I am very good friends of him."

A greater contrast could not be imagined than the neat gentleman and the somewhat disheveled Libbett; for a tumble into a dusty road from a rocking-chair on the back of an express-wagon is not accomplished without some damage to clothes and hair.

"Well, I am pleased to meet him," announced Sandy, cordially, "and I'm much obliged for him taking care of you, Libbett," she added, graciously, "though it was pretty careless of you to fall out when we fixed you in so nicely."

"I suppose," she went on to hint sweetly, regarding with absolute composure the elegant and somewhat bewildered Mr. Martin, who was not in the least used to children, "I suppose there won't be any objections to our taking a little hitch on behind?"

"Couldn't think of it," Mr. Martin recovered himself sufficiently to say. "Climb in, all of you"—

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with a sidelong glance at Tommy—"and I'll drop you at your own door."

Tom, the coachman, looked on in impassive but none the less utter astonishment, unable to make up his mind what was wrong with Master. That Mr. Martin should take into his carriage three dusty children! Well, he only wished that Master Lenny might see them; but, keeping that wish and his smile discreetly to himself, he drove on.

Mr. Martin didn't very well understand himself. It gave him a very queer feeling indeed, but one that he rather liked, to have Libbett's dusty black curls snuggled confidingly against his coat sleeve, and to listen to tales of the splendor and glory of the new house. He thought it a poor place enough, and these tales only more fully revealed to him its poverty. A poverty these happy children never seemed to realize.

"And you'll live next door to us," came softly from Libbett, as she stroked his gloved hand, after finishing the tale of how the old horsehair sofa with the big hole in it had been covered by Mother and Nancy with green denim, until it was ver-ry, ver-ry, re-mark-ably stylish. "That will be nice. You like neighbors, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Martin, patting the grimy little hand rather awkwardly, "I think I do."

But now they had arrived at their house, and Mr. Martin saw them all alight, thank him decorously, and the next moment forget all about him in a shriek of delight, for the next wagon-load was coming. Perched high upon it were Georgina and Phyllis, firmly held down by Alan, and in the livery-stable carriage just behind came Father and Mother and Geordie and Nancy. Father waved the key.

VII

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THERE was so much to do in the new house and in the new school that for two happy years Sandy just lived and grew each day without taking much thought for the morrow.

When Sandy was thirteen, things began to happen. When a family is young and growing, things usually do happen. They can't be just the same, for, whether one likes it or not, growing up makes a difference.

Libbett didn't mind growing up. As her pig-tails grew longer and longer, her legs likewise, and her skirts took more and more cloth, Libbett openly rejoiced. Soon she would arrive at the dignity of long skirts and hair done up on her head—like Nancy's; and she would be able to choose a career, like Nancy, and help earn money for the family. This was Libbett's modest wish, often voiced to Mother.

Mrs. Sandison only smiled and patted her head and said: "Time enough, Libbett. Be a little girl while you can. There are years and years to come when you will have to be grown up, whether you want to or not."

"It's nice to be grown up, isn't it?" Libbett asked.

Mrs. Sandison laughed as she looked about her at her great family and said, with just the faintest

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little sigh: "Yes, it's nice to be grown up, but it's nice to be growing up, too; so don't lose any of your fun on the way, Libbett. Take it all as it comes, as God meant we should."

So Libbett was content; but Sandy furiously rebelled. She protested and wailed as her thick, red locks grew longer and longer. The heavy braids hurt her head, she said. Openly she mutinied as her skirts grew longer. It prevented her running and climbing trees. Loud were the objections she made to growing up and being ladylike. She wasn't ready. She grew up just the same.

"We can't stay children," argued Libbett. "We've just got to keep on getting older every day, Sandy."

"Well, we don't need to talk about it," retorted Sandy, crossly. "I hate it, anyway, and I hate long hair and long skirts. I don't see any real fun in them, and there's no use talking. I don't want to grow up. I wish God would forget about me and let me stay thirteen for two or three years."

As this was impossible, Libbett labored with her, and, finding her labors in vain, applied to her oracle, Alan. Having with difficulty made him fully alive to the gravity of the situation, he agreed to talk it over with Sandy on one of their "Sunday walks."

These were wonderful morning strolls, when Alan went swinging through the country for ten or fifteen miles, while after him, like a leggy Irish setter, tagged the faithful Sandy. The understanding was that one needn't "keep step," and conversation was intermittent; but no one else would or could stand it, so, while the strain was great, the glory for Sandy was greater. After this eventful talk Sandy no longer complained quite so loudly, and allowed her

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hair to grow, with only an occasional growl as to the waste of time consumed in combing and brushing, and open envy of the ease and grace with which Tommy and Joe could push their short locks under the pump or into the stream and emerge refreshed, shaking the water from them like happy dogs.

Alan had spoken very gravely on the duty of being a lady, and Alan to Sandy was as one of the ancient and beautiful Greek gods walking on the earth once more. What he said was not only law, but a law pleasant to be obeyed. Of course, there were occasional lapses, but Alan had allowed for these, and as long as he knew that Sandy was trying that was all, as he said, any one could expect.

Then, just as the new house, in spite of shabby furniture and no money to spend on the garden, began to be one of the most pleasant and, to the family, the most beautiful place in town, Alan went away.

First there were long confidential talks between Mother and Alan, to which Nancy was finally admitted. Father was generally down-town at the newspaper office, and when he wasn't he was busy with some wonderful editorial which was to reform the entire political life of the town, and he would dismiss any subject, however important, with a wave of his hand and a "Talk it over with your Mother, and then we'll see."

Finally Mother and Alan decided that, however hard, it was best for Alan to go. Old Mr. Martin, who had grown to know all the family well through his great friendship for Libbett, had heard of an opening for a young fellow like Alan in Chicago, and the chance was too good to be lightly refused.

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If Alan went out now he could grow up with a big and growing business and be far more help to his family in a few years than if he remained in this little town and tried to bolster up Father's business.

Father was Father, and the most delightful man on the face of the earth; but his wife and son fully realized that never would he give the time and attention to his own particular business that he was perfectly willing to give to other people's. Therefore, it was quite useless to sink Alan's young energy into the business like so much capital.

Money for other people Father could always make, but for himself he scorned to be mercenary, and thought keeping out of debt by the smallest possible margin the whole duty of man. This fact Alan and Mother faced, and decided that Alan should accept Mr. Martin's offer.

So Alan went to Chicago.

"It's the first break in the family," Mrs. Mac said, solemnly, "an' tak' my word for it, Mistress Sandison, wumman, it 'll no' be the last."

Mrs. Mac was a quaint old Scotchwoman, Mrs. MacIntosh by full name, who had nursed all the little Sandisons, one at a time, and, now that they were old enough to do for themselves, spent an active life taking care of other babies.

"There's aye babies," she would cheerfully say, on the occasions when she "looked in" on her beloved Mrs. Sandison and the children. "There's aye babies, and the feckless folk that hae them would be in a sad taking if there wasna me to look efter them."

Alan, her favorite, had, of course, to go through the form of asking her advice first. She listened solemnly and then deposed:

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"There wiz a black cat cam' rinning across ma path the morn on ma way to this hoose. It's an extraordinar' guid sign, Alan, and if I wiz you I'd jist tak' ma fut in ma han' and awa oot Wast wi' ye. Keeping jist the yin thing in the back o' yer mind. Gie those di'el-ma-care cooboy a wide berth."

This Alan, after vainly trying to convince her that there were very few cowboys riding about the streets of Chicago, promised solemnly; and received her blessing and the pistol her husband, "The Major," had carried through the Civil War. It was big, clumsy, and old-fashioned, but Alan knew it was the most precious thing in her possession and received it reverently.

There were many queer things in Alan's trunk taking up easily more room than he could very well spare, but he would rather have left his best clothes behind him than the beautiful horse-reins Phyllis had made him on a spool, the wonderful wash-rag Georgina had crocheted, the pen-wiper Libbett had constructed, the slippers Nancy had embroidered, and the terribly crooked thing, over the stitches of which the unladylike Sandy, who hated sewing, had spent many tearful hours.

Alan accepted it with great appreciation and caution, and then hurriedly took it to his mother.

"What the mischief is it, anyhow?" he asked.

"It's a handkerchief-case," Mrs. Sandison said, with her own handkerchief over her mouth to suppress the laugh that shone in her eyes. "It might be cleaner, and it might be more symmetrical, but it's a wonderful achievement, considering who made it."

"It's great," Alan admitted. "Now that I know what it's for."

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When the dreadful day arrived and Alan went forth on his pilgrimage, the last thing he shouted was: "I've got that handkerchief-case in my bag, Reddy, and I'll never part with it." Then he rolled away with his trunk in the old depot hack driven by Danny Ryan, the expressman, who was sober for the occasion.

It seemed as if half the fun in life had gone with Alan; but before they had time to recover from his going another tremendous thing happened. Joe Drayton's big brother Will, who had returned from Yale a full-fledged lawyer, opened an office in town right next door to Mr. Martin's bank and offered Nancy a position as typewriter and stenographer. And Nancy took it!

Every morning when Mr. Martin drove to his office he took Nancy in the carriage with him, and at night he brought her back. Mr. Martin liked Nancy.

Afternoons, when you came out of school and walked down Central Avenue on the way home, you could see through the plate-glass window our Nancy, with her hair done up and long dresses on, clicking a typewriter or making marks in a notebook. Sometimes, if she was only working the typewriter, she would nod and smile to you through the window; but if she was "taking dictation," then you went past, simply feasting your eyes without hope of recognition.

Alan had been gone more than a year—nearer two—when he wrote that he would be home to spend Washington's Birthday. Great was the excitement, especially as he was to be home in time for the Club Dance, to which Nancy was going. It

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was to be a costume dance, and Alan was bringing home something wonderful to wear—the full dress of a Chinese Mandarin—borrowed from a tea-merchant just back from China. You were not to tell this, however.

Then, excitement on excitement, Will Drayton said it was a shame that the older set should have all the fun, and announced that Joe would give a party on the same night, a costume party, too, and Sandy was invited!

It was terrible; but Libbett wasn't! She was just too young for Joe's "set." At the first sight of Libbett's perfectly refined woe, Sandy declared she wouldn't go. Mr. Martin, advised of this dreadful state of things by Libbett, shared her sincere and ladylike scorn at the thought of Sandy's staying home on her account, and confided to Libbett that he had thought of having a party with ice-cream and cake, and the big music-box, all to himself—if Libbett was going somewhere else. If not, he earnestly desired the pleasure of her company and that of Georgina.

The atmosphere cleared wonderfully at this, and after Mrs. Sandison had arranged to allow Phyllis and Geordie an hour extra that same evening, the freedom of the kitchen, and a tub to sail boats in and have a "regratta," as Phyllis styled it—with refreshments—life at Meadowbanks went on smoothly once more, despite the bustle of preparation for all these festivities.

Sandy must be clothed for the party—and how? Every penny counted. Sandy must have "party slippers" and all the other pretty things. What could Sandy go "as"?

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Libbett had a great idea, originating in the fact that the big iron chair had to be covered with new cretonne.

The big iron chair was an institution in the Sandison family. It had come over from Scotland and had been in the family no one knew how many years. It was a truly wonderful chair. It folded up to be arm-chair, or folded half-down to be a lounging-chair, or folded all the way down to be a cot-bed. It took a great many yards of stuff for the big cushions which covered its stout iron frame. This year Mr. Sandison had taken some cretonne in part payment of a sum of money owing him by a dry-goods merchant who was threatened with bankruptcy. Most of Mr. Sandison's bills were paid in this compromise manner, his tender heart refusing to allow him to press for his legal dues. Mrs. Sandison often noted with a sigh that the children of these cheerful debtors had better clothes and shoes than Mr. Sandison's own, but she refrained from pointing it out to Father.

Anyway, the chair was to be newly covered, and, while the old cretonne was worn a little, it was not badly worn, and it was a much prettier and quainter pattern than the new.

"Why not," suggested the inventive Libbett, "wash it, which would fade it and make it even prettier, and make a 'Dolly Varden' dress for Sandy?"

Sandy wasn't very tall, and there would be plenty for the narrow underskirt and the puffed overdress of the quaint costume; and with some long black-silk mitts, which Mrs. Sandison fished out of her grab-bag, it would be complete.

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The problem thus satisfactorily solved, and Mrs. Sandison being a remarkably resourceful needle-woman, the old cretonne was skilfully cut up, and every day the costume became more and more real.

Calmly Sandy looked upon this quaint and beautiful dress; with even greater outward calm she discussed with Libbett the relative merits of talcum powder and corn starch for powdering hair, and with the face of an early Christian martyr tried over the different dance-steps with Nancy. A great horror of this grown-up amusement had entered into Sandy's soul.

Somehow she felt that with this first party she would step over the border line and be "grown up," and she didn't want to step. Any way she reasoned it, it was to be a real "girl's" occasion. Would she stand the test? Would her ancient cronies of the tree-climbing, tag, and snap-the-whip days rally to her aid, or would they prefer more ladylike girls? Then, if that happened, would she be that terrible thing spoken of with open scorn and pointed out the morning after by her more sophisticated party-going friends as a "wallflower"? She did not know. This party would tell.

It was at Joe's house, too. Never, oh, never, would she survive the shame of it if she was a wallflower at Joe's party.

And Tommy wouldn't be there to look after her. Tommy was never invited to parties in Egypt. Joe, prodded by Sandy, had extended a somewhat tardy invitation to him, but Tommy had refused, much to Joe's relief. Tommy was a good fighter; but—oh, well, Tommy's father and Tommy's clothes were

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a problem. It was just as well that Tommy didn't care for parties.

Joe informed Sandy that Will, who was going to the Club dance, had induced Mrs. Farwell, a pretty lady whose daughter, Milly, was a very sweet girl indeed and Sandy's particular admiration, to chaperon them, there being no female Draytons to preside over such festivities. Sandy dreaded Mrs. Farwell's merry glance, having once overheard her say that "Sandy Sandison always made her think of a setter pup, all red hair and legs."

Then, oh, dear! what if she didn't look pretty in the "Dolly Varden" dress? Sandy had never bothered as much as other girls about her looks, and now suddenly she became worried. So while Nancy sang and danced and gleefully awaited the night of the party, poor self-conscious Sandy spent hours peering in the glass, tying her hair first this way and then that, and wondering if her eyebrows were really as much darker as Libbett said.

One day, being more than usually preoccupied with the subject of looks, she broke one of Mother's precious gold-banded plates, and, being mildly reproved therefor, burst into such a storm of tears that Mother was fain to comfort her. Finally, after much questioning, Mother became aware that the clumsiness and abstracted air that had resulted in so much breakage and mischief was caused chiefly by the fact that this bundle of queernesses they called "Sandy" was oppressed by the idea that she was so "unattractive" and ugly, she was not a credit to the family, and they would all be ashamed of her—in that dress.

Only Mother's profound knowledge of life enabled

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her to recognize the seriousness of the case, and after listening carefully she began to talk herself. From this talk Sandy learned that her face was very intelligent, that to Mother she seemed very handsome indeed. Instantly the bowed head became erect, and the tearful eyes sparkled with triumph. Mrs. Sandison noted this, and added that she had long observed that Sandy's looks depended to a very great extent on her expression. More than most people must she guard her temper if she was to be considered good-looking. When Sandy was malicious or bad-tempered, then her straight features could not save her from looking rough and ugly. When Sandy smiled and was thinking about others, then her features became more harmonious, and she was what Mrs. Sandison gravely pronounced an exceedingly interesting and good-looking girl. In fact, some people might call her handsome.

Eagerly Sandy assured Mother that she would hold a tight rein on her turbulent spirits. If looks came from the soul, Sandy's soul would be swept and garnished.

Mrs. Sandison, as she reminded Sandy that it must be from the soul, not from any superficial desire to shine, remembered how many people older than heedless Sandy kept a smile on their lips from no higher motive than to keep wrinkles away.

"Look at Milly Farwell," Mother added, as she dismissed the now beaming Sandy. "Without half your pretensions to good looks Milly is called a pretty girl oftener than you are. Do you know why?" Sandy shook her head. "Because Milly is always thinking of others, and how to give them pleasure, and it shines through everything she does

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and makes her face lovely and pleasant to look at."

"But," said Sandy, looking at Mother elfishly, "if I thought about others all the time I—I couldn't think up the things I do that make the others find me more—more interesting." Sandy stared past Mother into a wonderful dream, in which she had become so terribly unselfish and beautiful that people cried out in admiration as she went by.

So staring, she tumbled over Mother's work-basket, tore a hole in her stocking, and after clumsily picking things up departed in search of Libbett, whom she finally cornered and asked for an "honest Injun" opinion of her, Sandy's, legs. Honesty compelled Libbett to admit that they were "the least teeny mite skinny." They discussed the wisdom of rubbing them every night with olive-oil. "Or vaseline," said Libbett, hopefully. "It's less smelly."

Alan's train came in that afternoon, all of which, as the younger Sandisons were released from household tasks and lessons on his account, was spent in taking turns sitting on the knees of the Great One; in admiration of his tales, and the addition which time had made to his mustache.

After supper, which was wonderful because of Alan's being there and having so much to say and Mother's beaming content as she gazed upon him, came the terrific ordeal of dressing.

There were frantic rushes along the hall for advice and assistance. Libbett dashed from one room to the other offering to hook, pin, or button. Georgina ran eagerly about offering a clean handkerchief as a panacea for all ills, while Phyllis was discovered

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at work upon Alan's shoes, polishing them with his silk muffler.

Then came the final dress-parade in the big front room. Alan was ready first, and was marvelous to behold, his fair hair covered by a black wig with a long, black pigtail dangling behind; a gorgeous mandarin's coat and a wondrous mandarin's hat with a peacock feather. When he put on his mask the children were frightened stiff. He was wonderful; but, then, no one in the wide world could equal Alan. Certainly not any one in this old town. His little sisters became scornfully proud as they openly reckoned on how poor a figure other young men would cut beside this brother of theirs.

As for Nancy! Libbett shrieked out in wonder as she came down the stairs: "Oh, Nancy, you're terri-bly love-ly." Nancy did look lovely and so grown up in that wonderful black dress, with those sweet yellow roses in her hair and at her belt, and with a black mantilla over her dark hair.

"Oh, she's just like the picture on the tam-bourine!" exclaimed Georgina, open-mouthed, alluding to a great work of art which hung in the upper hall representing the youth and beauty of Spain disporting themselves.

"Nothing in the town can equal it," said Libbett, completely carried away with her enthusiasm, "and with your nose hid, Nancy, no one will know you."

There was a little wait, and then Sandy came into the room, her mask on and her hair powdered. Very pretty she looked, for really the old cretonne dress was a great success. Sandy looked like a dainty figure from some old fan. When Alan said: "By

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George, Sandy, you look simply great!" her cup of happiness was full.

Of course, immediately afterward Sandy presumed on this and began preening herself and, as Georgina put it, "giving herself silly airs," so that Alan had to call her "Pinshanks" to take her conceit down; but he had said she looked "great." Libbett admitted now that her eyebrows were all right, and a lot darker, so what more could Sandy ask?

Alan took "Dolly Varden" down to the Drayton house in the hack which he had hired for the occasion. It was a terrible old trap, but the best—almost the only one—the town afforded. After he had deposited Sandy at Drayton's he was going to call for Elsie Dering.

It was tremendously exciting to Sandy to ride down-town in a real carriage, with Alan treating her like a "grown-up."

Before they left Leonard had come dressed as a wonderful gipsy and looking very handsome. He was going to wait with Nancy until the Martin carriage took Libbett and Georgina to his waiting uncle, when it would come back and take them to the dance.

Greatly excited, Libbett and Georgina packed themselves in and promised Mother to be very good indeed.

Sandy had just begun to think it was some fun being dressed up when the powder from her hair was so shaken out by the jolting that she began to fear there would be none left when she arrived.

The carriage drew up at Joe's door, and Alan helped her carefully out, saw her safely into the house,

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promised to call for her at the hour Mother had appointed, and then hurried away for Elsie.

Trembling with excitement, Sandy went up the stairs to the dressing-room. It was full of girls in all stages of prinking. All afraid to speak lest they should be known. This made it very unlike the usual girls' dressing-room, which hums like a beehive with chronicle and comment before the descent into the fray.

Breathlessly, with mysterious whispers and signs, they aided each other. Sandy put more powder in her hair, patted her puffed overdress into shape, and went down-stairs.

Mrs. Farwell stood near the door of the great reception-room smiling a welcome.

"How quaint!" she exclaimed to Will Drayton, who had stayed to watch the first arrivals, as Sandy came gracefully toward her, courtesied just as Nancy had taught her, and, taking her hand, kissed it.

"Isn't she a perfect dear! I wish she would speak."

Sandy only shook her head softly, so as not to disturb the corn starch, and walked away with a gorgeous Butterfly, who joined her. They were closely followed by a pirate and a knight in full armor, who in terribly husky tones requested the pleasure of a dance.

The Butterfly went down the room with the knight, whom Sandy suspected was John Clark; but by this time her pirate was towing her in their wake. Sandy began to understand that dancing, though a wearisome exercise when you practised it with a broom or a reluctant little sister, had its elements of pleasure when music, floor, and partner were just right.

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Sandy looked at her pirate more closely, and saw and felt that he was laughing and stealthily blowing the corn starch from a little strand of hair behind her ear. He gave one final blow, said in a satisfied murmur, "red," and then, "Hullo, Sandy!"

"Hullo Joe," answered Sandy.

"Gee, this is great," he went on. "How many people have you picked out that you know?"

"Not many; I haven't been thinking of it."

"Think now," urged Joe. "There's going to be a prize offered for the one who guesses correctly the greatest number before we unmask. Let's you and me be partners and tell each other?"

"Just as 'lieve," Sandy agreed. "You can have the prize. I don't care for prizes, anyway."

"No," said Joe, decidedly, "not at my own party. I'll tell you so you can have it. That's Beatrice Bunn in the pink thing with wings. What's she supposed to be?"

"A butterfly," Sandy judicially announced, marveling at Beatrice's wondrous peach-blow beauty, "or a fairy. It must be a fairy—from those wings."

"I knew it wasn't an angel, even with them." And Joe grinned, and then, as the music stopped, said hastily: "I say, Sandy, that wasn't half long enough. Lemme get myself down for another."

Sandy was just going to tell him, foolishly, that he could have as many as he liked when she saw the fairy signal to the pirate and all cordiality died within her. Let Joe go if he wanted to. She'd not keep him from Beatrice Bunn. Joe went on talking: "I'll put my name down here and here—and here—"

"Avast there, my hearty," said a jolly sailor—

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boy. "This craft's far too pretty to fly the jolly Roger any longer from her masthead. I'm going to take her for a cruise under my colors." Sticking a tiny American flag in the mass of Sandy's piled-up hair, he whirled her away from the indignant Joe. Sandy laughed as she clutched her sailor tightly to keep her balance, and then glanced over his shoulder to see where Joe was going. It was toward Milly Farwell, not Beatrice, and Sandy resigned herself cheerfully to the pleasures of the dance.

As the party progressed Sandy looked again toward Milly Farwell and wondered. Not that Sandy was behaving like Beatrice Bunn, who had already earned Mrs. Farwell's displeasure by overt rudeness and affected manners and voice. No; Sandy had been born with the instincts of a lady; but she, alas! had also the appetites of an artist, and instantly felt the flat taste of disappointment when things went too smoothly and conventionally. Now that they had unmasked and the contest was over, was this all there was to a party? Was she to smile amiably like Milly Farwell while she listened to these dull compliments on her dress and appearance, which Theodore Grace, a white-faced boy, who considered himself both grown up and clever, was uttering? To her own surprise she found herself wishing for Tommy Wilks. Tommy would never have paid her a compliment, but he would have made her laugh. Pooh! Where was the fun in this?

"Oh, bother, Theo," Sandy cut him short. "I'm just the same old red-headed Sandy Sandison. The dress hasn't changed me. Don't tell me any more silly stuff. How about our chances at the ball game next Saturday?"

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The astonished Theo didn't know.

"All right, then, I'm going to ask John Clark." And before the aggrieved but polite Theodore could offer to escort her—to the amazement of Milly and other little girls with ideas of deportment—Sandy promptly left her partner, and, sauntering across the room, looked up John for herself.

It was not done, of course, but naturally John didn't mind, and neither did Sandy, who soon had a little knot of devoted ball-players about her eagerly explaining their chances for the next game. While other girls waited a bit for their salad, sandwiches, and ice-cream Sandy was surrounded by comrades who had successfully raided the tables for the best for themselves—and Sandy.

Milly Farwell, while perfectly looked after herself, viewed this with dismay. She liked Sandy, and it was lovely to see her so popular; but should she so obviously enjoy it and keep so many of the boys to herself? Why, it was almost as bad as Beatrice Bunn!

Evidently Mrs. Farwell thought so, too, for she said a few words to Joe, and then, walking over to Sandy with him, pleasantly broke up the little circle by sending several of the boys on errands which took them in the direction of the girls to whom they had been devoted in the first part of the evening.

Joe, who had edged his way nearer Sandy, his face perfectly solemn, but his dark eyes snapping, leaned toward her and spoke. "Let me take that empty glass, Sandy" was all the boys sitting near her heard; but as his hand closed over the glass, he spoke low in her ear one single word: "Flirt."

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Astonished, Sandy straightened up and looked at him.

"Have you seen our night-blooming cereus?" he asked, serenely.

"No," said Sandy.

"Then come along; I'll show it to you. Willy, my son, burden yourself with this also." And he put the now useless glass in Willy's unwilling hand. With his own hand on Sandy's elbow he was soon guiding her (Sandy called it "pushing" her) past the little crowd of dancers at the farthest side of the room and through the narrow door of the conservatory. It was dim and warm in there. Sandy released her arm.

"I don't care for night-blooming cereuses," she said. "I think they're a stupid flower."

"So do I," laughed Joe, closing the door behind them.

"Then why did you—"

"Because I wanted to speak to you, myself," he answered, "and get you away from that crowd of athletes you were flirting with."

"I wasn't," Sandy denied, hotly. "We were just talking 'ball.'"

"Oh, I don't care how you do it," Joe answered. "It was flirting. What else do you call it when you take so many fellows away from the other girls that Mrs. Farwell notices it?"

"I'm sorry," said Sandy, simply, "if I've hurt your party any."

But Joe put his hand on her arm and turned her toward the window, through which the February moon was pouring her lovely light, and he saw her eyes were twinkling with mischief.

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"Sorry," he echoed. "You were as pleased as Punch. You don't fool me, you know, Sandy. I've half a mind to—" And he bent his dark head nearer hers.

What it was he had half a mind to— he never said, for as sparkling eye met sparkling eye, Sandy paled—and—slapped his face.

Joe dropped her arm. His face flushed with anger as well as the blow, and he had his back to the door, barring her escape.

For a moment they stood there facing each other, and then Joe laughed. Sandy grew angrier and angrier, but still Joe laughed. Finally he stopped and opened the door for her.

"Why, you're only a kid, after all," he mocked. "I thought you were grown up."

"I am," asserted Sandy, shaking her powdered head so vigorously that the corn starch flew. "Look at my dresses!" she almost screamed, as he stood there smiling. "See how long they are, and I am over fourteen."

"You might as well be ten," Joe answered, "for all you know."

Then as she went through the doorway he added, with an assumption of world-weariness that annoyed her greatly, "But you'll be worth while when you do know."

"Know what?" asked Sandy.

"Know that you are grown up," answered Joe.

Just then Milly came to tell Sandy that Alan had called for her.

Alan took Sandy home. Afterward he would return and finish his own party, for the grown-ups danced late. Sandy, from whose wrist dangled the lovely prize fan, was very silent.

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"What's wrong with Reddy?" Alan demanded, unable to understand this unwonted silence. "Didn't you have a good time, old girl?"

"Oh yes," said Sandy.

"Weren't there partners enough to go round?" he asked, sympathetically; for Egypt, like most small villages, generally boasted more girls than boys.

"I had everybody in the room I wanted," said the blasé but truthful Sandy. "One time I was almost too popular."

"Dear me!" murmured the amused Alan. "The rumor that I was taking home the belle of the ball was correct. Then why so sad, sister?"

"I wish I was grown up," sighed Sandy.

VIII

MICKY AND BUSINESS

GEORGINA felt very sad about herself this morning.

Alan had gone back to Chicago a long time ago. Everybody missed him, but it seemed to Georgina that she missed him most of all.

Even at this early age Georgina drooped without masculine society and companionship. Her pride kept her from saying just why she drooped, and the family merely thought that her wits were wool-gathering or she wasn't feeling very well.

It was really dreadful not to have a big brother around the house. Lenny Martin came over a great deal, but he seemed to think it was enough if he said, "Hullo, Georgy," and let you sit on his knee for a while. He wouldn't play games or tell stories as Alan used to. He was always talking to Nancy or playing tennis.

Georgina attempted to open a discussion with Sandy on the subject of "foundlings." She had decided that she was so unlike all the others that she was probably an adopted child. Sandy had shown herself singularly unsympathetic; had laughed and pointed out that Mother often said Georgina was very like her great-aunt Janet Sandison, so she must belong to the family.

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"How do you know that Great-aunt Janet, who's nothing but a picture, anyway, wasn't adopted herself?" calmly asked the desperate Georgina, and then walked away, feeling that every man's hand was against her.

It did seem as if that was really the case, when half an hour later it was discovered that Geordie and Phyllis were missing, and Georgina had been told to keep an eye on them.

"I did," she said, hotly. "I did; and they were going to the brook when I rested that eye just a minute by looking at a picture-book. I couldn't use the other on them," she asserted, doggedly, "because it was the eye the other side from the path."

No one sympathized. Even Mother said Georgina should have been more careful, and she was despatched down the road to look for the missing ones, while Sandy, just home from school, went hunting the woods and meadows, and Libbett went weeping up to Mr. Martin's place for help and comfort from Tom, Martin's coachman.

Georgina was to tell Nancy and Father if she reached town without finding the children.

All the way down-town Georgina plodded, weeping bitterly for the lost ones, and when she came to *The Sentinel* office and found it closed, and no Father anywhere about, her tears began afresh.

It was rather a wet and soppy Georgina who reached Nancy's office; but in the middle of her highly emotional tale the telephone rang, and Nancy answered it and returned smiling to tell Georgina that she might cheer up. The lost had been found trying to cross the meadows for "catter-

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tails," and, wet and muddy, had been restored to their anxious family.

Nancy was very busy, so Georgina was given a clean handkerchief and told either to sit still and wait until Sister was ready or to go home quietly now.

Georgina didn't like offices where everybody was too busy to be polite, she explained; which meant too busy to make much of Georgina. Nancy realized this, but said she really could not help it this time. It would have been different if Mr. Will Drayton had been in. Georgina approved of him, and he of Georgina, but he was out, so Georgina thoughtfully and prettily withdrew.

She went down the street a bit out of sight of the office and its windows, and then, with a determined look on her little face, turned in the opposite direction from that of home, and began walking up the hill toward the river.

It seemed to Georgina that there was very little use going where one was not fully appreciated. She was very glad Geordie and Phyllis were all right; but they had been naughty to run away. Yet they would be made much of to-night, because everybody would be so glad to have them back. Running away seemed to make people very anxious about you and very glad to see you again.

Without really admitting to herself that she meant to run away Georgina turned the corner of the road and felt herself going farther and farther from home. It was a nice wide, shady street, with big houses on it set back from the road. Oh yes, Georgina knew where she was. This was Hillside Drive, and the big lawns of these houses went straight down to the

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river, for Egypt was built on two ridges of land, one sloping down to the river, the other sloping down to the Salt Meadows. In the middle, where the ridges met each other, there was a flat space, and that was where the railroad, the station, the factories, and the shops were.

This was a nice place, Georgina decided, to walk in, and much more stylish than where they lived. If she had been choosing a house she would have chosen it here. Of course, Meadowbanks was nice, but it must be lovely to have a back yard that went right down to a river. The Because Why of that was, if you had a big brother like Alan he would make a boat.

Georgina had not been looking where she was going and didn't notice that here the sidewalk was cut into by a drive which went up to the piazza of the big red-brick, pagoda-shaped house on the far corner. There was a rain-washed hole at the edge of the drive, and down went Georgina flat, her nose in the cinders.

The drive was hard. Georgina lifted up her face to wail aloud, and then, remembering that there was no one in sight, that she was far from home, and that it would really do very little good, smothered her sobs. Georgina was by nature extremely reticent.

"Oh, dear!" she moaned to herself, as she sat back right in the middle of the drive to examine her face and brought back a small cindery fist covered with gore. "Oh, dear, I am bleeding!"

This was an unheard-of state of affairs, and one that should never occur to one far from home and sisters. Georgina hastily unfolded the clean hand-

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kerchief which Nancy had given her and thoughtfully applied it to her nose. It came off just as red as her hand, and it showed much more, for the handkerchief was white. Here was a pretty how-de-do!

"If I get up quick it may start hard again," Georgina reasoned to herself. "I will just sit right here for a while, good and quiet, and hold the handkerchief to it, and then see what happens."

So agitated had she been at the sight of such a quantity of gore she had not heard a carriage coming up the road, and when a voice demanded, "What are you doing on my drive, little gir-rul?" Georgina slowly lifted her eyes above the hanky, now, alas! no longer white. She held it tightly pressed against her tiny Roman nose, while her brown eyes looked with coldness at a big man leaning out of the side of his carriage, which, drawn by two big black horses, had stopped in the road before taking the turn into the driveway.

"Do you not see I am wanting to get into my grounds?" the man continued.

"My nose is bleeding," Georgina answered, with quiet scorn and without raising her voice or rising. Georgina always knew what was due her. "If your nose was bleeding the way mine is," she continued, "I guess you wouldn't think of anything else but sitting still and holding it, either."

"She has you there, Father," said a slim boy of fifteen, on the opposite side of the carriage, leaning out and surveying the suffering Georgina with interest.

He was not so handsome as Alan, nor so old, but he was a nice big boy, consequently Georgina smiled

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at him over the bloody handkerchief and coquettishly shook her pony locks a little.

This made the nose start bleeding again, and Georgina thoughtfully applied the last clean corner to it, with a sigh of pity and terror for herself. Oh, the family would be very sorry when they saw this, and Sandy would be sorrier than anybody else, for Sandy in her wrath had called her a "forgetful little monkey." Monkey, indeed!

The old gentleman was speaking: "You will be getting down and lifting the young lady up, Micky," he said, without a smile, "and bringing her into the house for attention, and then maybe me and my horses will be allowed to take our way in."

Smiling, Michael O'Donovan Joseph Mary Patrick Conry got leisurely out of the carriage and leisurely made his way to the damsel in distress.

It made his father fidget with irritation to see how leisurely he was. Would Michael never learn to speed himself, and did the boy not mind that he was waiting?

Micky looked down at the forlorn little figure, and then, "Will you come into the house, little girl?" he asked, with an engaging Irish smile and voice; "and my sister will be fixing that little beak of yours in no time."

Georgina looked at him with approval. He said "beak" instead of nose, just like Alan. He was nice.

"Lift me up," she commanded. "I don't dast to move, 'cause this is my only handkerchief, and it's sopping," she added, tragically. "I guess I've lost a quart of blood, and the doctor will have to make some new and poke it in somewhere," she finished, with a sigh.

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"Oh, it 'll not be as bad as that yet," said Micky, gallantly lifting her to her feet and pressing his own fine and immaculate handkerchief to the "beak" in question, so concealing the terrible little red rag she was holding. "We'll fix it all in a jiffy," he continued, taking her in his arms and going quickly across the lawn to the piazza, arriving just as the coachman, relieved of Georgina's obstructing form, brought the horses round with a flourish and Michael's father got out of the carriage.

At the same time the door opened, and a neat maid came out, followed immediately by a sweet-faced young lady, who said: "Oh, Micky, and what is the matter with the child?"

"I'm not adzactly a child," came in muffled tones from the covering of handkerchiefs. "I'm more like a pretty big girl, I think. I am nearly ten, and I'm losing every drop of blood in my body," she wailed, as Micky withdrew his handkerchief for a moment to give her air, and a fresh spurt followed the action.

"Poor dear," said Miss Conry, gently, patting her arm. "Micky will carry you up-stairs, and we will fix that poor little nose."

"It would be as well to know, Molly"—came in commanding tones from her father, who was not used to being overlooked at his home-coming. Indeed, the whole household and its arrangements swung about his comings and goings. "It would be as well to know how she came be the nose and who she is."

"Oh, now, Father," chided Molly, softly. "Not just now. The bleeding must be stopped first." And she turned and went through the doorway,

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giving a direction to the maid in an undertone, and followed by Micky with Georgina in his arms.

"It was blooded by your old cinders," said the indignant Georgina, quite forgetting her manners and glaring reproachfully at Mr. Conry over the handkerchiefs. "My name is Georgina Campbell Sandison," she added, "and my father will put that hole in your drive in his paper next week if my nose isn't all right."

After this dreadful threat she subsided on Micky's shoulder.

"There's more truth than fiction in that," murmured Micky, with a glance at his bewildered father. Unheard of! No one dared find fault with Mr. Conry's slightest speech or action, and here was a child taking him to task.

Micky went up the stairs as fast as he could with such an armful, and started to place his burden in a nice soft easy-chair which Miss Conry had pushed forward. Her room was lovely and sweet and peaceful, and far richer and prettier than any room Georgina had ever seen, but she clung desperately to Micky's neck, with a sudden realization of how far she was from home and Mother.

"You are very nice and kind," she said, politely and approvingly; "but I should like to go right home, please, if this nice big boy will carry me."

The nice big boy looked a bit aghast at the thought of it, and finally his sister persuaded their wounded guest to submit to her gentle ministrations, and Georgina subsided into the chair with a moan. "I think I have made some of my teeth a little sick, too, by the feel," she sobbed, sadly.

It was a very pale and exhausted Georgina who

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lay on the couch in Miss Conry's room and listened to Micky telling his sister that he had telephoned to Mr. Sandison, and told him they would bring Georgina home in the carriage as soon as she had had dinner.

"I don't think I ought to have any dinner," whispered the now conscience-stricken Georgina to Micky, as his sister went out of the room to pacify her father and see that the long-delayed dinner was served.

"Why not?" asked Micky, throwing his long, thin legs over the side of the arm-chair and looking down on the smitten Georgina with all the superiority of his fifteen years.

"Because," Georgina answered, her lip trembling a little from weakness, and from regret at having to tell this nice boy anything that might keep him from admiring her—"because I was trying to run away."

"You were!" said Micky, turning a laughing eye upon her, for Micky was the youngest in his family and had never been called upon to be a guide and example to the young. "Well, you are a nice little holy terror! What were you running away for?"

"You wouldn't understand," sighed Georgina, "if I told you."

"Oh, try me," pleaded Micky, bending his thin, boyish face toward her, and with his sparkling blue eyes beginning what Georgina called "coaxing without words."

"No," Georgina decided. "You would laugh like Alan does."

"Never," said Micky.

"Honest and truly?" asked Georgina.

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"Honest and truly!" swore Micky, repeating it solemnly after her.

"Well, then," said Georgina, winding her arm about his neck and whispering in his ear. "They don't ap-preciate I'm growing up at home, and I want to be ap-preciated. Are you laughing?" she inquired, anxiously and without removing her arm.

"No," answered Micky, in a queer, choked voice, "I'm strangling, but I appreciate you."

"Then you don't think I was horrid to run away?" inquired Georgina, anxious to have his good opinion.

"Not as long as you stopped here." And Micky gently released himself. He wasn't used to little girls, but he liked Georgina. "If you'd gone on any further I would have been pretty mad."

"Then you do like me?" asked Georgina, modestly.

"First class," asserted Micky.

Georgina thought a moment, and then: "It won't do any good," she announced, calmly. "I might just as well never have run away and blooded my nose, because we live so far away I won't ever see you much, and it won't have done any par-ticklar good. My falling down and losing so much blood on your drive, I mean."

"Oh, but it has done good," Micky assured her, earnestly. "It's made a terrible impression on me, and if you will promise never to run away again and bleed on other people's drives," he said, solemnly, "I'll come up and see you quite often."

"Will you?" asked Georgina, doubtfully. "Truth and honor?"

"Truth and honor!" swore Micky again, solemnly; and he kept his word.

Thus did Micky come to know the Sandisons and

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to give his help in deciding Sandy's career when some time afterward Sandy graduated from Egypt's grammar-school.

There was no high school then in Egypt, and, though Professor Skelly, the same snoopy person who had almost caused the skinning of Tommy Wilks, assured all anxious parents that he had so graded his classes that a graduate of his school was the equal of a graduate of the neighboring city's high schools, the shrewdest of the parents had grave doubts. Among these was Mrs. Sandison. Mr. Sandison, being at present engaged in booming Egypt in his paper above all the surrounding county, would listen to nothing against its educational system.

Mrs. Sandison's suspicions, however, leaped very near the truth when she felt, rather than knew, that Sandy didn't really understand algebra. Sandy didn't. It was just some kind of a tricky game to her. A game without rhyme or reason; something that by sheer luck and juggling you go through with and make the required "General Average."

It wasn't really Sandy's fault. As Egypt's school was run no one ever explained, or indeed had time to explain thoroughly, the real meaning or use of the so-called "advanced studies." History and literature Sandy devoured; but for the rest, hers not to reason why, hers to make an "average" or not "be promoted." Many a thing was a sealed book to Sandy which might have been a pleasure if it had been thoroughly and simply taught. Sandy was to live years out of school before by her own hard study she learned piecemeal what they had forced down her throat whole at school.

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Dearly would Mrs. Sandison have liked to send Sandy to the city to school, but it was impossible. There was literally "little to earn" in Egypt for a man like Mr. Sandison, and at home there were "many to keep."

All this last year Sandy had been studying shorthand under Nancy's supervision, and the old typewriter Nancy had learned to write on was again doing service in educating the stubborn fingers of Sandy. Sandy could write now as fast as Nancy, and was well qualified to do the simpler work of an office. She hated the thought, though, but this she kept to herself.

Mrs. Sandison's plan was that whatever Sandy earned should be set aside so that in a year or two she could stop and study whatever she chose and become wondrously learned. Privately Sandy felt this would be a frightful grind. However, Mother wished it, so Sandy kept her plans to herself. Mother might not understand them; especially as she and Joe and Tommy had decided to charter a boat for the South Seas. Joe was to write *à la* Stevenson; Tommy to captain the boat; and Sandy, in order to make everything all right, was to go as a missionary.

While Mrs. Sandison was anxiously wondering what would be the best thing for Sandy—for in spite of her sixteen years Sandy was still an impulsive tomboy in many things—Georgina's Micky solved the problem. His father was a well-known real-estate man with large offices in the city. It was Micky who persuaded his father that he needed just such a capable young person as Nancy in his New York office. Mr. Conry, who had risen from the

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ranks himself and was a little prejudiced against new-fangled notions, including women in an office, held out against the idea. Micky, spurred on by his admiration for Mrs. Sandison, who had made herself at once the friend of this motherless boy, brought Father face to face with Nancy, and Nancy did the rest. It meant a much larger salary than Nancy was receiving; therefore Nancy became a commuter, and Mr. Drayton agreed to take Sandy in her stead.

So Sandy was placed in what she scornfully called "the cage." "That's what business is," she explained to Mr. Drayton, "a cage."

Mr. Drayton laughed and agreed with her. "It is a cage for the human young," he said, "and it breaks and tames the weak until they begin to think there's nothing beyond its bars. To the strong it is merely the bounds within which they play a game, fascinating, if you play well enough to win."

"I don't think it 'll break me," Sandy confided to him, "or that I'll ever care to learn the game. I'll escape."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Mr. Drayton, smiling at her appreciatively.

Sandy found it a little hard at first, but here in Egypt it was a friendly little world that liked all the Sandisons and tried its best to make even business easy for them.

IX

THE CHIEF GOES

"IF you don't get up this minute, Sandy," said Libbett, one morning at a quarter before seven, "something will happen to you."

"Oh," yawned Sandy, as she slid out of bed and sleepily made her way to the tub of cold water that alone had power to thoroughly rouse her, "nothing ever happens here or to us."

Many a day in the coming years Sandy was to think over this careless, impatient speech of hers and wish she had never made it. How gladly she would have had things remain as they were! How willingly never had anything happened if—but Sandy, like the rest of humanity, had to take things as they came. She could not know or read the future.

They were particularly gay that morning at breakfast, especially Mr. Sandison, who had just completed to his satisfaction an article urging the town council to take some action in the case of the Golden Novelty Celluloid Company, whose factory, Mr. Sandison contended, was too near the center of the town and the railroad-station for public safety.

He had in his article pointed to the fact that dangerous explosives were used in the process of manufacture and that even the finished product was highly inflammable. In a small place like Egypt, with

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only a volunteer fire department, it was a criminal thing to have this factory right in the heart of the business section. So argued Mr. Sandison in his article, as he had protested and argued from the first. Many of the townsmen, however, had sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces working in the factory, and they insisted that the town was small and needed just such opportunities for employment as the factory offered; and the company had made many blithe promises when seeking permission to build. Promises which they were just as blithely forgetting now that the neat one-story buildings, arranged about a square paved court, were occupied and humming with industry.

So Mr. Sandison had decided to appeal directly to the public, to warn the public of their danger and, if possible, force the company to remember its promises; to guard the public safety by isolating that part of the plant where chemicals were stored and by putting in a somewhat expensive sprinkler system.

"We will smite them this time," he thundered, "hip and thigh. They sha'n't go on running risks without knowing what I think of it, anyway."

Mrs. Sandison and Nancy agreed with him and heartily encouraged him.

"It will make you some strong enemies, Father, won't it?" asked Sandy, across the table. "You may be sued for libel," she added, airing her legal knowledge.

"It doesn't worry me an iota," said Mr. Sandison, cheerfully. "Not an iota."

Libbett hastily slipped from the table to look that word up. Libbett had a passion for words just now,

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and woe to the unwary individual who used one in her presence and was not able to immediately and thoroughly stand by and explain it.

Sandy and Father started down-town together at a quarter past eight. They had a lovely walk. When Father wasn't spouting editorials about the factory and expecting Sandy to admire, Sandy was reciting her part in a witty farce that Egypt's select dramatic society was to give shortly, and expecting Father to admire.

When they got to *The Sentinel* office they were in such a happy frame of mind that Mr. Sandison dismissed Sandy with an extra pat on the back and a caution: "Not to be self-conscious, and she'd be far and away the best of the lot."

That being Sandy's own opinion of her performance, she was, of course, delighted, and went whistling up Central Avenue and into Drayton & Overbeck's law-office. Will Drayton had opened a law-office in the city this last winter and taken on a partner to keep the Egypt office going until such time as Joe should be ready to help him. He wanted the business one day to be Drayton & Drayton, both in Egypt and in town, when Joe finished his studies.

Joe hadn't as yet expressed himself on the subject, but Will thought it a good sign that Joe was constantly at the office nowadays, and this was summer-time, too!

Joe wasn't there, of course, when Sandy arrived; but toward eleven o'clock he sauntered in, looking more than ever dark and smiling and tricky, and so much more stylish than the other boys. Joe's clothes and the number he wore were at once the marvel and scandal of Egypt.

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"Hullo, Sandy!" he called, nodding carelessly as he entered, and went to his desk. He looked over one or two letters to which Mr. Overbeck directed his attention and listened gravely to what Mr. Overbeck had to say.

Mr. Overbeck was a tired, dusty little man of about thirty who had married young and who always began his objections to any and everything he was asked to do with: "When a man has a wife and three children he can't—"

Somehow this always roused Sandy's ire, and a desire to retort: "Well, you married to please yourself, didn't you?" It was trying to have this handicap forced upon your attention so often during the course of a day.

Presently, as Sandy got deeper and deeper into her bill of complaint, Joe came over and stood looking down at the gleaming red braids, as their owner bent over her notes.

"Sandy," he said, finally, having fully made up his mind, "what are you going to do this afternoon?"

Saturday afternoons were Sandy's own.

"I don't know," Sandy answered, coldly, for she had decided notions of propriety, believing that while in the office you should conduct yourself on the "strictly business" plan, and consequently deeply resenting Joe's endeavors to distract her attention.

"I haven't thought about it," she added, with a business-like air.

"Bosh!" said Joe, standing so that he screened Sandy from the anxious Overbeck, who was pouring over an affidavit. "Why aren't you honest with

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me? Are you going to play tennis with Mick Conry and the other fellows?"

"They may be coming up," answered Sandy, flushing under his steady gaze and annoyed at him for being so persistent; "but I'm not the only Miss Sandison, you see."

"You're the only one I want to see!" Joe retorted. "Come out with me in the canoe this afternoon?"

Sandy drew a long breath. She would like it above all things, but could she say she would go?

Sandy wasn't quite sure what Mother would say. Nancy had gone on the river with Lenny; but, then, Mother trusted Lenny. Would Mother trust her with Joe?

Joe saw the hesitancy in her eyes, and leaned forward to say something utterly convincing, when a dull, heavy report smote their ears, and at the same time the whole building shook. The big plate-glass window-pane bent inward and then fell, smashed in a thousand pieces. Almost as quickly Joe had sprung between Sandy and the falling glass.

A moment after, the glass had ceased clattering, and Sandy, Joe—still with his hand on her shoulder—and Mr. Overbeck stood looking at each other, pale and startled, asking, "What was it?"

As if in answer the watch-factory whistles began to blow frantically, and the fire-bell began to toll, and as Sandy and Joe reached the door they saw that almost every window in sight was smashed and that the frightened shopkeepers and residents were rushing into the street, all asking the same question, "What is it?"

It was answered presently by John Smith, the carpenter, who tore along the street calling out:

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"Explosion at the Celluloid! It's on fire! Lend a hand with the engine! The Chief's down there a'ready!"

Instantly all the firemen in the crowd began tearing up the street to the engine-house, and Sandy, her heart in her mouth, began running hatless toward the station and the factory.

Joe, without a word, ran alongside of her, and as they went they passed sobbing women and frightened children.

One of the women clutched Sandy's arm.

"My Gerty!" she wailed. "Is she hurt?"

"I hope not," panted Sandy. "Father 'll know."

"The Chief's there," the woman said, turning to her frightened companion. "The Chief was always fighting against this. He'll look after the girls."

There were many women and girls employed in the factory.

Their faith in Father warming Sandy's heart to more than its usual pride in him, she turned the corner with Joe and stood still for a moment horrified.

"You'd better go back, Sandy," urged Joe. "I'll go and find Mr. Sandison."

"Joe," answered Sandy, "I've got to see him myself."

They went on a little slower. Not because they wanted to, but because they were paralyzed at what they saw. The railroad-station and all the shops facing the square looked as if they had passed through an earthquake.

As they hurried past Old Egypt House they ran into Tommy Wilks' father, who was running, too, despite his fifty years and some two hundred and fifty pounds. He stopped for a moment with the shock

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of their collision, and then, looking into their faces dully, "God!" he said, "my Tom may be in that!" and pointed to the factory.

From the corner of the factory square nearest the railroad-station a tremendous volume of clear red and yellow flame shot skyward. Pouring over the tracks and into the station came a crowd of frightened, crying women and girls, cut and bleeding, with here and there a man staggering along carrying some badly wounded fellow-worker in his arms.

Dr. Halliday passed them, whipping his foam-flecked old white horse. On the depot platform young Dr. Morland knelt ministering to the most unfortunate.

High above all Sandy heard Father's voice—that wonderful, clear tenor voice that, singing or speaking, always commanded attention. "Don't lose your heads, boys," he was calling, cheerfully; "we'll have it under in no time and everybody out!"

Sandy dashed past Joe and along the station platform. There was Father, easily distinguished in his cool white ducks, hatless and coatless, on the roof of the low building nearest the flame, fighting it with the pitifully small emergency hose. At intervals, when he didn't need his voice to cheer up the people round him, and some still in the factory, he used strong and cheerful early English expressions to signify his opinion of the owners of the factory—all in the city, of course—and the slowness of his own engine company.

Breaking away from Joe, who had clutched and held her back, Sandy tried to get nearer; but already the Chief had given strict orders to keep the people back. No one knew what might happen the next minute.

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Getting as close as she could to the edge of the crowd, Sandy made a trumpet of her hands and called out: "I'm here, Father! Anything I can do?"

"Yes; keep back, Sandy," Father answered, after one quick glance, turning his attention to his work. "I don't want to have to fash¹ myself about you. Help the doctor if you can."

"Shall I telephone the Lehighs?" Sandy called.

"Good girl. Get back and do it. Ah, there they come!" he shouted, with relief, and Joe swept Sandy out of the way as Egypt's hook-and-ladder truck, with the engine in the lead, clattered onto the spot.

As Sandy turned to go to a telephone a figure on the roof near Father waved a grimy hand at her.

It was Tommy Wilks, begrimed and blackened, and now she remembered that Tommy, whom she had rather lost sight of lately since business had absorbed her, had been working in the factory for the last two weeks. She turned to Joe to ask him to tell old Mr. Wilks Tommy was all right, while she telephoned; but Joe was already busy grappling with ladders and hose, and working as though he had never been anything else but a fireman all his life.

With a warm feeling within that she had always known Joe was all right and that kind, Sandy ran to the drug store to telephone to Lehigh, the nearest town, four miles away, for help.

Mr. Small, the druggist, who informed her that they had already done this, pressed her into service and sent her back to Dr. Halliday laden with bandages and restoratives.

¹Bother.

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As she left the drug store she was met by a fleeing crowd made up of all the less injured, although cut and bleeding, so that they made a ghastly picture. They were all making what speed they could to get out of the way.

Although the factory, composed of a square of one-story brick buildings, was ablaze only at one end, the end nearest the railroad-track, where the explosion had occurred, the only entrance was at that end. In the center of the court formed by these buildings, and some distance away from the packing-room, where the fire was, stood the laboratory.

That the Chief was taking a big risk standing where he was directing the streams of water upon this fiery corner, everybody knew and recognized. He asked none of his men to do it, sending the oldest and hardiest of them to search that part of the building which was not on fire for the killed and wounded. The explosion had blown down walls, windows, and machinery. Some of the factory hands, alas, never would be found, no matter how long the search for them.

Beyond the packing-room, and not yet on fire, but impossible to get at because of the heat of the flames, were work-rooms, and it was the Chief's hope that they could get the flames down sufficiently to reach these rooms and make sure that everybody was out.

Meantime he stood where he felt he was most needed, and Tommy Wilks, full of admiration, refused to leave the roof while the Chief was there.

Just as Sandy had entered the drug store to telephone, a man who had been carried out of the fac-

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tory—a big, strong Swede, the porter in one of the packing-rooms—revived. He sat up, took one look about him, gave a yell of “Ban the Chief har?” and pulled himself out of the hands of his rescuers.

Two of them, thinking he had gone suddenly mad, dashed after him, but he was climbing up the ladder to the roof, still shouting “Chief!” and finally plucked that personage by the sleeve.

As the Chief was both busy and worried, the men about him and standing at the foot of the ladder, knowing his quick temper, looked to see the Swede felled to the ground. Something in the fellow’s honest, agonized face checked the Chief’s indignation.

“What’s wrong, Olesen?” he asked, kindly. “You’ve been badly hurt and scared, man, but you must get back out of this heat.”

“Garboys,” gasped the Swede. “Seex beeg garboys! I ban myself carrying them yistiddy. And,” he added, “if they catch the fire, good-by, Egypt!”

“Speak low. Where, man?” said Mr. Sandison, passing his hose to one of the men who had followed the Swede.

“In der gemist’s blace,” replied Olesen, pointing to the center of the court. “He ban killed and dead. He left me, and he go there.” And he pointed to where the red flames were licking through the roof. “But all the seex garboys—is in hees blace.”

Finally the Chief got him to explain that it was in the center of the courtyard, or square formed by the buildings, and just under an immense standpipe—the one thing the Company had not broken faith about. If the explosion had not shattered the water system, that standpipe would save them.

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If it had, and the flames reached the "chemist's place," or laboratory, it was as Olesen had said: "Good-by, Egypt."

It was a slim chance, but without one glance at the faces of the men about him Mr. Sandison knew it had to be taken, for from what Olesen had said there were still men penned in the other end of the building. If a second explosion took place it might wreck the town, and it would certainly cost these men their lives.

Chief Sandison turned to his assistant. "Get all the men down off the roof," he commanded, "and play the hose on the roof at a safe distance until you see if I come through."

"Chief," gasped his second in command, "you'll never do it!"

"Oh yes, I will," said Mr. Sandison, easily; "but keep the men down from the roof, so that they can run—if they must. For Heaven's sake keep the crowd back, for if the flames reach the carboys before I do, or if the standpipe's gone up, it will be, as Olesen neatly puts it, 'Good-by.'"

"Don't go, Chief," began Smith, the carpenter, who was busily handling a hose.

The Chief took hold of the small emergency hose that had already stood him in good stead and began to go cautiously along the inside edge of the roof, dragging it after him.

Tommy Wilks followed before any one could stop him.

"Good boy, Tommy," called the Chief, without stopping or turning; "but you'd better go back while you can, my son."

"Guess not," answered Tommy.

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Neither could say any more, for they were now on their hands and knees groping through the reek and smoke along the extreme edge of the roof. The Chief dragged the hose, and Tommy eased it along. Blinded and gasping, they crawled forward until the Chief's outstretched hand struck—nothing. They had reached the corner.

Tommy steadied the hose, which the Chief grasped to break his fall as he dropped over the side. Tommy heard him give a little gasp as he struck the flagged court. He was a heavy man, and had turned his ankle under him. He called out, "All right, boy," and Tommy spun to the ground and landed like a cat.

The smoke wasn't quite so thick here, and the spurts of flame lit up everything in a ghastly way.

There was the chemical laboratory, and, yes! there stood the big standpipe with the sprinkler attachment, which the fleeing and frightened employees had never thought of turning on.

"Up with you, Tommy!" said the Chief, and again like a cat Tommy swung himself up on the Chief's shoulders and turned on the water. There was a horrible, breathless minute of suspense. Had the water system been wrecked by the explosion? If so, all they had done was useless and everything would go.

The water answered them. It gushed out, and with infinite pains they trained it directly on the laboratory. It rained down steadily, cooling the atmosphere and soaking the small building. For a time, anyway, those dreadful carboys were safe, and if they could once get the fire under control the explosives could all be safely moved. In the burning

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part of the building there was only a very little explosive material left, not enough to do great harm, and with the flames once under control they could get in to the lads caught under the wreckage at the further end of the square. Tommy and the Chief could faintly hear them calling above the roar of the flames and the water.

Elated with the thought of danger past and good work done, Tommy and the Chief turned to retrace their steps, dragging with them the useful hose.

"You go first, Tommy," said the Chief, cheerfully, as they gained the roof again by aid of the overflow-pipe. "You're the lightest, and this roof must be getting weak by now, so I'll have to go a little slowly," he added, saying nothing to the boy of his injured ankle. "You go ahead and tell the men to work like fiends to get the fire down and clear the entrance so that we can get back to those poor fellows." Tommy started on ahead.

There had been no need to tell the crowd that they must stand back. As soon as the half-crazed Olesen had gone into their midst yelling "Garboys" and "Good-by-Egypt," stark terror had possessed the souls of those who had with difficulty lived through the first awful moment of the explosion. They fled. They tore themselves from the doctors' hands.

It was into this panic-stricken crowd that Sandy walked, her hands full of bandages.

"Where's Father?" she demanded of Dr. Halliday.

As if in answer to her query Tommy Wilks stumbled into view. "We've done it!" he yelled, and collapsed on the roof.

The men dragged him to his feet. "Where's the Chief?"

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"He's coming. He says to get off the roof. It's going."

The crowd cheered as they carried him down the ladder. The hose had been taken off the roof as the Chief had directed, and the men were fighting the fire from the ground and from water-towers hastily constructed of ladders.

"Where's the Chief?" came from fifty throats at once, as Tommy staggered to his feet.

"Coming, and he says to tell his daughter he's all right."

As if in confirmation of this the Chief himself came lurching into view through the cloud of thick smoke that half obscured the roof. For a moment he stood erect, with a smile on his face; then it changed.

"Get back! Get back!" he called, and made a leap forward just a second too late, for the roof went down with a crash, and the Chief went with it.

X

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SANDY never remembered what she did after that. She had a vague remembrance of calling aloud and rushing forward and hearing a voice say: "Don't let her look, man! Don't let her look!"

Then she found herself in Dr. Halliday's arms, and Joe's anxious grimy face looking over the doctor's shoulder.

There was a dismal sound of sobbing near her.

"He made me come first," she heard Tommy Wilks say. "He made me come first, because I was lighter. Oh, I wish I hadn't now. What 'll they think of me? Mrs. Sandison, I mean?"

"My lad," somebody said, "ye've nothing to reproach yourself with. There's many a man in this town would be proud to change places with you to-day."

"Where's Father?" asked Sandy, struggling to leave the strong arms that held her. "Let me help look for him," she said, determinedly.

"It can't be done. Alec Sandison's saved half the town," said the doctor, grimly; "but there's no living man can go into that red-hot mass for hours to come."

"Then who's to tell Mother?" whispered Sandy.

The men looked at each other and said nothing.

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Finally Dr. Halliday, his face grown very old and tired, said: "Get my carriage, Joe. I'll have to take her home."

Sandy watched Joe go, supporting Tommy Wilks, who had suddenly, as he expressed it, "caved in." Sandy, who had not spoken to him, did not realize that it was the sight of her grief-stricken face that had finished poor Tommy.

Sandy sat beside the doctor in the station while he dressed Mary Scott's burned arm and Alice May's cut head and set the shoulder of Ole Swenson, who had been thrown across the engine-room by the explosion.

All the time people were sobbing about her, and every time Father's name was mentioned there was a fresh burst of grief; but Sandy's face was hard, and Sandy's eyes were dry.

The doctor kept them from speaking to her, and made her help him sometimes to keep her from looking at the fire, which was being fought now by the Lehighs as well, and bravely fought. The men worked like heroes that the Chief's work might not be undone.

Joe brought the carriage. In the general demoralization of the whole town he could not find the doctor's hired man, so, after taking Tommy home, he had driven it round himself.

Dr. Halliday resigned his work to the young doctor from Lehigh and got into the carriage beside Sandy. Joe whispered to him that he would drive, and through it all Sandy could think of nothing but that it was cruel to take her away from the place where Father had been; but she couldn't cry.

Just before they turned to drive away a train

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came through. They had been holding all the trains back on the meadows because of the danger while the fire was at its height.

Will Drayton and Lenny Martin got off the train. The doctor and Joe spoke to them, and Will patted Sandy's shoulder, and Leonard took her hand. There were tears in their eyes as they told her they would wait for Nancy and bring her home. Sandy thanked them in a voice that didn't seem to belong to her, and then the carriage went on.

Dr. Halliday put his arm around her, and said: "Cry if you want to, my dear child."

"I can't cry," answered Sandy.

The doctor nodded his head. "Sometimes it is that way." Then he added: "You must bear up and do what you can, for I'm a little afraid," he said, sadly, for he loved Mrs. Sandison—"I'm afraid of Mother's heart."

Then no one said anything more, and the carriage went on up the road.

Meadowbanks being a long way from the factories, the shock of the explosion had not been felt there, although they heard a dull sound; and then, of course, the fire-bells and whistles were heard, though faintly. They all knew there was a fire somewhere, and Geordie and Phyllis wanted very much to run down the road and see if they could see any smoke.

But Mrs. Sandison thought it was too hot for any of them to go down-town, and, by telling them that they could wade in the brook for a while if they were good and did not tease, got them so much interested in that beloved sport that they forgot about the fire.

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Georgina was reading a book in the hammock, and, the Saturday morning's work having tired Mrs. Sandison very much, as usual, even with everybody's help, Libbett tried to induce her to lie down for a while; but nothing would make her go up-stairs.

"I'm what Mrs. Mac would call 'fey' to-day," she said, with a little smile, "and I'd rather not be alone, Libbett. I'll rest in this big chair, if you will bring your knitting and sit by me like a good child."

Libbett went for her work, and as she entered the room softly again and sat down, Mother, whose face was very white and tired, leaned over to pat her hand.

"You are a good girl, Libbett," she said, softly, "and a great comfort to me."

There was a little pause, and then she said suddenly:

"The whistles have been blowing a long time. They have an eerie sound. I wish they would stop."

Libbett asked if she would like to have her telephone down to the town and find out about the fire, and Mrs. Sandison looked at her eagerly a moment and then shook her head.

"No," she answered, "your father would tell us if there was anything we ought to know." Then, half to herself: "Time enough when it comes without running to meet it."

By and by Libbett thought Mother had fallen asleep, and rejoiced to think that she was taking a rest when she heard her say, very low but clear: "Alec, must you go?" Then, in a strangely certain tone: "Well, go, then. I'll not be long following you."

Libbett turned quickly and saw that Mother was

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lying back pale and exhausted, with her eyes closed and the tears streaming down her cheeks. Libbett went to her and tried to rouse her, but for a few moments could not make her understand or listen, and when she did open her eyes she looked about her shuddering.

"Mother," implored Libbett, kneeling beside her with spirits of ammonia in a glass of water, "look at me, dear. Don't you know me? It's Libbett. You have been having bad dreams."

Then Mrs. Sandison looked at her understandingly for the first time and shivered. "Yes," she said, "that's what it would be—a bad dream."

She took the glass from the frightened Libbett's hand and pretended to sip it. Presently she laid it down and lay back, with her head turned away to the window, and the room grew very still.

Libbett began to be very much worried indeed, and had just determined she would telephone Father to bring the doctor home with him when the sound of wheels came in at the window and the doctor's carriage came along the drive.

Before Libbett, at the window, could speak or turn Mrs. Sandison had risen from her chair, was out in the hall, out of the door, and down at the foot of the steps waiting as they drove up.

They came slowly, Joe with his grimy face, the kindly doctor with his set sad face, and Sandy with a face like stone.

The carriage stopped, and the doctor and Sandy got out and came toward Mrs. Sandison.

At the sight of her face Sandy's stony grief melted into human anguish.

"Mother!" she cried, leaning toward her. "Father—"

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"Then it was not a dream," said Mrs. Sandison, slowly; and the doctor caught her as she fell.

One glance at his face, as he laid her down gently, lifted her hand and dropped it, told Libbett that Mother had kept her word. She had not been long following.

PART III

For Life is joy, and mind is fruit
And body's precious earth and root.

MASEFIELD.

XI

AFTER

ALAN came on and stayed until all their affairs were settled, doing his best to comfort his poor fatherless and motherless sisters. There was very little money, for Mr. Sandison had never had much, and after all the bills were paid there were only a few hundred dollars left for the children; and Alan, of course, turned that over to his sisters and promised to keep on sending them all that he could.

Mr. Martin promised Alan to look after the girls. It was far better that they stay here where they had friends. That they had friends there was no doubt. The whole town mourned for Mr. Sandison and his wife.

The number of people who knew Father and loved him wasn't astonishing to the Sandison children; but it had always seemed to them that they alone knew Mother, that she was entirely theirs. Lo, at her going there sprang up a whole host of people to tell them of little quiet kindnesses done which they had never forgotten and of which her children had never known.

When everything was over Alan went back, and Mrs. Mac came to stay with them and look after "her fairly," for Nancy could not stay at home now, and neither could Sandy.

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As for Libbett, hour after hour she slaved at her music, for Libbett had great talent, and Mr. Martin was determined that she should be well taught. Libbett was equally determined that she would soon be able to earn her own living at this dearly beloved art and get money for the family purse, which was so flat and shrunken now.

They would get along somehow, and everybody was kind and considerate; but it was terribly hard. They had so little to do with, even though Mrs. Mac was a great manager.

They had seemed poor enough before, but now one had to hurry right home as soon as one was paid without looking into a shop window for fear some of the milkman's or the coalman's or the grocer's just dues would fly out of your purse and make life just so much harder for everybody next week.

All this time, for pride's sake, you must keep people from guessing; and you must keep cheerful for the younger children's sake. Georgina, Phyllis, and Geordie were "as good as gold," according to Mrs. Mac, and they never fussed about not having things.

Alan was doing all and more than he should, and Mr. Martin was kind; but Alan was so far away, and money simply vanished, and calculations that showed how you could just squeeze through suddenly became utterly untrustworthy, because some little incidental expense, forgotten when you were calculating, presented itself and demanded payment.

Well, the pot must be kept a-boiling, and they were young and healthy and loved each other dearly—more dearly than ever now that they had sorrowed and suffered together; so they tried to make a joke of their financial stringency. Sandy having dramat-

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ically declared one Saturday that the groceries were being paid out of her very "heart's blood," it became the practice to hand over the money to Nancy on Saturday nights with the cheerful announcement: "Here's my heart's blood," or "Here's this week's sweat of brow."

Poor Nancy, on her fell the heaviest burden of all, for she was the highest authority at home and the largest wage-earner away from it. Though she might be dropping with fatigue when she came home from the office, she found waiting for her there all the unsettled disputes of the day. Mrs. Mac might be and was an excellent physical director, but Nancy was the court of last resort for manners and morals, and Phyllis and Geordie were at the "hard-to-manage" age.

The years slipped by while the girls worked on, and because they were young and good to look at people never guessed that they were having a hard time; and that being young and good-looking sometimes made it just a little harder.

Sandy especially felt this, and threw herself into her work as she had never done before. She meant to become an expert and make more money for her beloved family, if she had to leave Drayton & Overbeck and go daily to the city. Sandy didn't intend to be a stenographer all her life. She set her teeth when she realized how long, at this rate, it would be before she could follow her own bent; not that she wasn't glad and proud to do her share, but Sandy was ambitious. She wanted to do more than her share, and she wanted to do it differently and grandly.

Mother had told her once that she could do any-

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thing she liked if only she liked hard enough. Sandy was going to get what she wanted, she told herself, if it took until she was eighty to get it.

Meantime she missed, more than she knew, her comrades Tommy and Joe, for the years were making a difference. Tommy's poor, shiftless father was dead, and Tommy, with that father's reputation to live down and his own living to make, was having an up-hill fight. As for Joe, Sandy only knew that she must get away from Drayton & Overbeck's office soon. If it had been hard enough before, it was impossible now to have Joe about. Joe, with plenty of money. Joe, who had never denied himself anything, and could not understand any one he knew being as poor as they were. Joe, who kept asking her to do things, to go places with him, which she longed to do and could not; because she couldn't afford clothes.

Sandy couldn't tell him that, of course, so Joe was beginning to think that she didn't want to do anything he asked; and Joe was Joe. If Sandy wasn't delighted to see him, now that he was home for the holidays, why, there were plenty of girls in Egypt who were. If Sandy wouldn't go places with him, there were plenty of girls who would.

Sandy realized this, too, and keenly. All the more so because this second summer after the fire Joe stayed away from the office for days and days, and when he came never apparently had time to say more than an abstracted "Good morning" to her.

Sandy knew the crowd he was going with now wasn't good for either Joe or his pocketbook. Altogether it wasn't easy to bear, and she could not

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contemplate a repetition of it through another long vacation term. She would get to the city this fall.

She walked up and down Meadowbanks drive alone, one night after dinner, making up her mind just how she would tell Will Drayton that she wanted to leave his office. The fact that she hadn't seen Joe for several days was the most important factor in this decision, had Sandy only realized it. She turned to go indoors, her mind fully made up.

The light from the long French windows streamed out cheerfully to meet her. In the sitting-room she could see Phyllis and Mrs. Mac playing "double Canfield," while in the big front room Libbett was softly interpreting Schubert to Nancy, Leonard, and Micky, with Georgina at his feet, her head on his knee.

Sandy heard her name called softly, and, turning, saw Joe standing beside her in the shadow of the big beech-trees.

"Don't go in yet, Sandy," he begged. "I walked up all this way just to find you."

"Well, now that you have found me," said the startled Sandy, "come in and join the others and hear the music."

"No," said Joe, smiling; "I'm fed up with music. I was in training for the Glee Club all last winter. Besides," he added, whimsically, "how much would the others enjoy it if I did?"

Sandy said of course that they would like it, but as she did she thought swiftly that it was curious the girls didn't like Joe over-much; and, while Leonard and Micky did, they were not together a great deal.

"Come and take a moonlight stroll with me,

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Sandy, there's a duck," Joe began; and then, hesitatingly: "I—I've something to tell you."

Without a word Sandy turned, and together they went up and down the moonlit road just in front of the house, but so screened and hidden by the deep thicket and trees that they seemed miles away. Libbett began to play the barcarolle from "Tales of Hoffman." Sandy had always considered it a "trivial tune"; but to-night it seemed to take on a queer, haunting significance.

"Well?" Sandy asked.

"After I finish this cigarette," answered Joe. "You, and the moonlight, and—a cigarette. It's heavenly."

And just because she agreed with him in her inmost soul Sandy's Scotch conscience wouldn't let her enjoy it. It kept suggesting, plainer and plainer, that something was wrong.

"What is it, Joe?" she asked, abruptly. "Why won't you come in?"

Joe looked at her and threw away his cigarette. "Because I don't want the others—to know I'm here," he answered.

There was silence for a few seconds.

"I'm tired of—everything; and I'm going to cut and run, Sandy."

"Joe!"

"Oh, say something else except my name, there's a good girl," he said, impatiently, trying to see her face. "Haven't I made myself plain? I'm going to clear out, vamose, get rid of the whole kit and b'iling; this old town—Yale—and—"

"And me," finished Sandy, and hated herself for saying it.

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"That's the hardest part of it," said Joe, and looked at her with the old merry light in his eyes. "But you wouldn't consider coming along, would you?"

They both knew he meant it.

"No," answered Sandy, and didn't look at him. But Joe knew she meant it, too.

"Take a little time to think it over," Joe urged, coming closer and speaking low and quickly. Sandy was such a thorny rose you never knew just how or when to grasp her. "We suit each other down to the ground, Sandy. Always have. We were made for each other, and you know it. You've always understood, and I think—you've always cared, and I—do I need to tell you how I love you? Why, I've always loved you!"

Sandy was dumb—struck dumb by Joe's use of that wonderful word "love." When we are older and grown more careless we use it to cover a multitude of feelings; but when one is young it has but a single lovely meaning, and the word itself is white magic.

Joe was smiling at her rapt face. "Marry me now, Sandy," he whispered. "Both of us need a lot of breaking in; neither of us wants to give in, no matter how fond of the other. We'd best begin—early.

"Besides," he added, looking at her in a way that made Sandy's heart leap—Joe's eyes always said more than Joe's words—"it would be fun, sheer fun for us. Think of the things we would love to do—together. I've plenty of money, you know. I mean to fetch up in the South Seas for a breathing-spell; then Japan—China—"

"Oh don't, Joe, please!"

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Joe stopped and bent quickly toward her, but Sandy jumped back.

"What are you afraid of?" sneered Joe.

"I'm not afraid of—anything, but I'm afraid for you," answered Sandy. "Oh, Joe, you'd better be honest with me. Something's wrong. What—" she stammered, as she came close to him, her hand on his arm, and looked up into his face—"what have you done?"

"Nothing," muttered Joe, angrily. "At least, nothing to make you afraid of me."

"I'm not," said Sandy, stoutly, "only—"

"Only you don't quite trust me," supplied Joe.

"Only I don't quite trust you," echoed Sandy; but when she saw the look in Joe's eyes she was sorry she had said it, and added quickly, "for yourself. I'd trust you—for myself any day, Joe."

"Now you're not quite honest," Joe retorted, "for if you had such perfect trust in me you'd—come along. You want to."

"I know it, but—how can I?" Sandy said, simply. "I'm not free as you are. I'm needed here."

"You've got your own life to live," said Joe, contemptuously. "You can't be bound down that way. Every woman has a right to leave her family when she marries. That's understood. No one would blame you. If they did—let 'em come to me." And Joe slipped a protecting arm about her and drew her to him.

But Sandy put both her hands on his shoulders and kept herself at arm's-length trying to read his face. Well she knew that if she let Joe once take her in his arms she'd never get away.



"OH, JOE, YOU'D BETTER BE HONEST WITH ME. SOMETHING'S WRONG. WHAT—" SHE STAMMERED, HER HAND ON HIS ARM—"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

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"I'd blame myself," she said; "and, besides—" she added, and then stopped.

"Besides what?" asked Joe, belligerently.

Then, because she was very young and agitated, Sandy was very cruel.

"Besides," she said, "women marry men, not run-away boys who are afraid to face other people and come sneaking up in the dark."

Joe gave her one wretched look from a white, angry, sneering face, turned on his heel, and went running out of sight.

Sandy's heart stopped at the sound of those running feet, it seemed to her for ages, and when it began to beat again it was a grown-up heart and hurt horribly.

"Joe!" she called, desperately, and ran down the road, throwing caution to the winds. "Joe! Joe! Come back!"

If Joe heard he never turned, and presently she lost him.

Finally, breathless and tired, she became aware that she was a long way from home, that it was dark and late, and the road was lonely.

Frightened more at herself than the dark road, Sandy faced about to go home and stumbled against Tommy Wilks.

Sandy would have fallen if Tommy hadn't held her.

She pulled herself away with a jerk. "Tommy! Tommy Wilks!"

"That's me!" said Tommy, without smiling. "Come, I'll see you home."

"Were you following me?" asked Sandy, without budging.

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"Sure thing," answered Tommy. "I saw you weren't fit to look after yourself, and that Joe evidently didn't intend to help you out—"

"Then you saw Joe," commented Sandy. "Where is he?"

"Half-way to town by now," said Tommy. "Come, Sandy. It's late."

"But I must see him, speak to him!" Sandy cried.

Tommy looked at her for an instant, astonishment and disapproval in his keen eyes and square jaw.

"You've said enough to Joe to-night," he answered, "and if you think I'm going to escort you to Old Egypt House's little back room, to the scandal of the whole town, so that you may continue your conversation, you're mistaken."

"Is that where he is?" asked Sandy, with a shocked face. For that back room was the well-known source of whatever went wrong in the town or with the townspeople.

"Surest thing you know," said Tommy. "In fact, he called to me to meet him there when he passed me."

"Tommy," Sandy announced, "I can go home alone. You go and look after Joe."

Tommy stood for a full minute gazing at her, and then took her arm and turned her in the direction of Meadowbanks.

"The sooner you begin to realize, Sandy," he remarked, "that Joe and you and I are grown up, although I admit we're young enough yet, the better for all of us. Joe's no longer a little boy. He's a man, and not a particularly good one, either. He's a selfish young man with too much money and too

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little self-control. That is how I would describe him if I was asked."

"I didn't ask you," snapped Sandy, white with vexation and anxiety.

"I know you didn't," retorted Tommy; "but you've just naturally got to be told. Sing this over to yourself when you're alone: 'Joe is a man, and I've got to let him alone until he gets his balance.'"

"But, Tommy," pleaded Sandy, "I've hurt him cruelly."

"Yes," said Tommy, hurrying her along. "I judged that. If I hadn't seen it plainly written on his face," he added, "I'd beaten him within an inch of his life when I saw you running after him. But I judged Joe had just received rather more than he could very well stand."

Sandy was too much engrossed in her own thoughts to be astonished that Tommy Wilks, whom all the rest of the town looked down upon, was calmly sitting in judgment upon Joe and herself. Tommy, who worked when he could at what he could, held back by his father's reputation, who thought and studied for himself, and bided his time.

"I—I was cruel to him, Tommy," admitted Sandy again.

"Yes, you would be," Tommy agreed. "Come on."

Sandy stopped. Tommy looked at her concernedly, for Sandy's eyes were full of tears, and her mouth shut hard to keep the sobs back. It was the first time Tommy had ever seen Sandy cry.

"Oh, don't! Sandy," he blurted out. "Joe isn't worth it."

"He is! He is!" Sandy sobbed. "It is I who

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am mean and selfish. I'm always in the clouds. I never see what's happening right alongside of me. I might have helped Joe. I might have been the best friend he ever had; helped him find his real self by saying just the right thing to-night. I thought of myself. I didn't think enough—of Joe—until—just the minute after—”

“That's you,” interrupted Tommy, cheerfully, “every time. You always think of a kind thing—the minute after. Well, it's the minute after now; say it to me. I need it—quite as much as Joe.”

“Tommy,” said Sandy, facing him, “I'd rather go home myself, please, quite alone than have you talk this way.”

“I'm looking after you,” stated Tommy, coolly, “because you can't look after yourself, and on the way, for the first and last time, you're going to hear some home truths.”

“I won't,” said Sandy, with a jaw as firm as his own, the fighting look of the small girl Tommy knew so well. “Go back, Tommy, and let me go on alone.”

She stood waiting in the middle of the moonlit road for him to go.

“You are foolish to take Joe so seriously,” Tommy began, calmly. “Joe takes himself too seriously. Joe isn't worth much trouble, anyway. He's a waster. Look at him,” Tommy continued, unconscious how much of bitterness crept into his voice. “With everything in front of him, and a good old name, plenty of money and position behind him, he doesn't use anything—doesn't do anything. Joe isn't trying to improve his stock in trade; he's marking it down. Give him up, Sandy. I'm fond

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of Joe, too, and I'd do a lot for him, but Joe—Joe isn't worth your tears. He's a pig-headed, selfish young—waster."

"That doesn't prevent his needing a friend, and he needs one badly just now," announced Sandy, meekly, for as Tommy had talked one of Sandy's flashes of intuition illumined her mind. Without daring to pause she put it into words. "Tommy, you agree with me that Joe's—well, likeable—don't you?"

"Joe's a good fellow," Tommy answered, "and uncommonly good-looking, if you mean that."

"No," said Sandy, brushing by the covert sneer at the open love of beauty which was so strong a part of her. "I mean, we both like Joe, we both know him well, and we know he's too good to be wasted. Tommy"—and Sandy leaned to him, her whole face alight with the hope of his seeing all she meant—"if I go home quietly, if I promise not to interfere, you take hold of Joe. You stop him. You—you be the friend—he needs."

Tommy gasped. "You don't ask much, do you?"

"If you don't," said Sandy, "I'll do something desperate. I feel it; something that will make everybody talk; and you won't like that, and it will be terrible for the family—the girls; but I can't let Joe go down. I won't let Joe—I won't let go of Joe now until he has a helping hand. Yours is a strong one," she continued, with true feminine intuition. It didn't matter how she did it, she must reach Tommy. "He's going to leave town to-night, Tommy. Stop him."

Tommy turned to her, had she had eyes to see it, the face of a young Crusader. "Not me," he said;

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"but if you'll stick to your share of our bargain I'll go with him."

"What am I to do?" asked Sandy, incautiously.

"Leave the whole thing in my hands. Don't lose your head and come running after me or Joe. If you do I'll drop the job. If you give me your word I'll take it on."

Sandy looked at him, not yet believing. "You mean you'll—"

"I'll go with him when he goes. He's right to go. He's spoiled himself here. No one would believe in him or help him—the right way. He's been quarreling with his brother. He's been kicked out of college—"

"Was that it?" said Sandy, thinking aloud.

"Oh yes," Tommy answered her, scornfully. "Joe had the usual experience of those gay young dogs who can't understand that a university is meant to put something into their heads, and think it a place for what they call a 'good time.' Joe and several others had too good a time one night, after a select little card party toward the end of the term. The authorities heard of the party—and the fight afterward—and Joe was requested not to return."

"But, Tommy, wouldn't it be better for Joe to stay here and live it down?"

"Where you and the rest of the girls would proceed to pity and pet him; or, if you didn't do that, would anyway take his mind off what he's got before him—that's to make a man of himself? No," said Tommy.

"But you—" began Sandy.

Tommy gave her a look that said, plainly: "Oh, you have remembered me at last!" but said nothing.

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except to explain in a perfectly matter-of-fact voice: "I'm about through with this town just now. Here I'm simply 'Tommy Wilks,' and, though I've educated myself far more truly than Joe Drayton and his set, I'm still supposed to be—well, just Tommy Wilks. Mind, I don't blame Egypt. The scandal poor old Dad's habits made in town is laid, some of it, at my door. Though Heaven knows I went to Old Egypt House more to keep Dad and others from getting in too deep than for pleasure. But Old Egypt House and that back room there are the worst things the town could possibly support, and, being Father's son, naturally I can't make people see it or lead a crusade against them with any force. Then there are other things—"

He glanced at Sandy, but Sandy was so busy wondering about him that she was staring straight ahead of her. How had Tommy Wilks come by this sureness of judgment, this clearness of vision, this sane outlook on life? And, though his speech was still abrupt and slangy, there was a refinement in his manner which made her marvel.

If Sandy had ever known Tommy's mother, a gentle Englishwoman who had married for love beneath her and died early, she would have perhaps understood more readily. Tommy's quick intuition and unexpected gentleness were strange only to people who had never known gentle Anne Wilks.

But Tommy, after glancing at Sandy and seeing that her mind was not following his argument, evidently made up his mind to say no more. "It's better for me to go away," he continued, quietly, "to make myself fit for what I'm going to do, and look after Joe—as much as he'll let me," he added,

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whimsically, "if I have your promise, Sandy, to leave us both entirely alone."

"Tommy," said Sandy, "I hate to have you go."

"Miss me terribly, won't you?" said Tommy, grinning.

"Yes, I will," declared Sandy, stoutly.

"But you won't get all out of breath running after me—to ask me to stay?" finished Tommy, with inward bitterness but an outward grin.

"No," answered Sandy; "I won't, if it's the best thing for you—and Joe. Besides," she added, "you'll come back."

"Oh yes, I'll come back," declared Tommy, grimly, "and all Egypt will know it when I do."

They had reached the gate of Meadowbanks, and Tommy held out his hand. "You'll be all right now," he explained; "and if Joe goes he'll take the 10.30, and I've got to get at him first before—" And he stopped abruptly.

Sandy shuddered as she took his hand. Then the rumors that Joe had been drinking to excess lately were true.

Something in Tommy's eyes made her hold his hand tightly in both of hers and try to say—she hardly knew what—that he evidently wanted to hear; but all she managed to stammer was, "Good-by."

The look died suddenly out of Tommy's eyes, and his hand was quickly withdrawn from her. This time it was Tommy who went running down the moonlit road.

Sandy stood where she was listening to the rhythmic sound of his feet, for Tommy ran splendidly, swiftly, evenly, and without hurry. Then, as the sound died away, with a feeling of unutterable loneliness Sandy turned and ran toward the lighted house.

XII

MORE UPHEAVALS

NEXT morning the town rang with the news that Joe Drayton, dismissed college, had quarreled with his brother and left town with Tommy Wilks.

All Joe's real faults were deepened and blackened, and many imaginary ones added to make the news more spicy in the telling. As for Tommy, people were a little annoyed when they searched Tommy's record to find that the worst thing they could say of him was that he was "old Wilks' son."

They made that sound badly enough; and by fastening to Tommy several of the most unsavory of the back-room episodes, with which, of course, he had had nothing whatever to do, there was enough to last Egypt that day and for many a day after, had it not been that before long the town suffered another severe shock. Beatrice Bunn, always noticeable, now made herself conspicuous by running away, rumor said, to go upon the stage.

Sandy, who found, to her amazement, as self-absorbed people do, that others knew or suspected much more than she had about the state of Joe's feelings for her, carried her head proudly and answered truthfully but briefly the questions asked her. She likewise managed to conceal her indignation and helpless rage when, disappointed in not

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finding in her the conventional heartbroken and deserted girl she was reported to be, they began to connect Joe's flight with that of Beatrice Bunn and "wonder if there wasn't something in their both going away so suddenly."

At home the girls had been kind and thoughtful. They had said nothing, judging from Sandy's rather unnaturally stern expression that nothing should be said.

Mrs. Mac, to be sure, had permitted herself to say audibly to Nancy, for Sandy's benefit: "It was just a God's providence that yon wastrel Joe had been taken oot o' the way or Guid kens whatna like mischief him and thon red-heided lassie would 'a' been up to."

But then Mrs. Mac had merely accepted Sandy as a necessary evil in the Sandisons' life; never really welcomed her.

The hardest thing to bear was when Will Drayton spoke. He called Sandy into his private office the morning after Beatrice had left town and asked her if she, Sandy, could tell him where Joe was.

"No," said Sandy.

"You knew he was going?" asked Mr. Drayton.

Sandy nodded, for she didn't seem to have any voice.

"What did he tell you?" Joe's brother urged, gently.

"Only that he meant to go away."

"That was all?"

"All about—himself," said Sandy, quickly, and flushed.

Will's eyes sought hers, and seemed to read in them that she was trying to help, not hinder, him,

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and he began suddenly to talk, as though he must say it to some one.

"You see, Joe's only a boy—only a boy on the wrong tack; and I—I've been the wrong kind of brother—to let him get so far away from me. Treated him like a man—because I thought that was the best thing—for Joe. Then—then he wouldn't come to me and tell me when he got in a little scrape. If he'd only come—I would have helped him out. I would have understood. I ran into that sort of crowd myself when I was his age. If I'd been properly looking after him from the first I could have warned him what he was in for when he struck—that bunch. But Joe—Joe always seemed to know so well what he was about. The money—he spent—is nothing. It was his. It's the thought—that after all he was—only a boy up against it—and I failed him."

He had forgotten that to Sandy Joe might seem grown up. He had forgotten everything in the relief of talking the thing out to some one who cared about Joe.

"I failed him, too," said the miserable Sandy. "I might have stopped his going away—that night—if—if I'd been kind. But I drove him away—alone—" She stopped abruptly, remembering Tommy.

"Then he did ask you to go with him? And you wouldn't?" said Will Drayton, approvingly. "I thought so."

The blood surged from Sandy's toes to her forehead, and she sat tongue-tied before him. How could he know? The world seemed a dreadful place, where people guessed at your hidden emotions and

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dragged them into the daylight. It wasn't quite fair. Something that no one but herself and Joe should know—and here his brother put it baldly before her.

Sandy couldn't know that Will was admiring her more than ever for the stand she had taken. She simply felt humiliated.

"Forgive me," Will Drayton said, quickly and gently, seeing that the girl was suffering, and thinking it was because he had been too abrupt. "But I couldn't help seeing how it was with Joe."

Couldn't help seeing! Had it been so plain to others—what she had realized too late—that Joe cared?

"I was glad it was—you," Will went on, simply. "I thought it might save Joe—a lot—if it was you, because I knew you would call out the best in him."

"Well, I failed him, too," Sandy said, quietly. "I sent him away—angry. Oh, if I'd only thought in time—about helping—him!"

Then Mr. Drayton, being the kind gentleman he was, roused himself out of his own misery and sought to comfort the girl before him. "It's the price youth pays," he said. "Don't blame yourself too much, Sandy. Youth acts on impulse. When you are old enough to think first and act afterward, why, then"—and he tried to smile like a grandfather—"why, then you probably won't have so many opportunities. It's the way of the world. But between us," he finished, sadly, "we seem to have made it rather difficult—for Joe."

As the days went by and still nothing was heard from Joe, Will grew bitter. He was deeply hurt. Too hurt to realize that Joe, like many another

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younger brother, had misunderstood his elder brother's attempts to be a father to him. Joe had characterized all Will's efforts to help as "interference," and wanted Will to understand, finally, that he could manage his own affairs.

Will spoke of this openly only to Sandy; and Sandy tried to defend the absent one.

"He—he didn't understand," she said, eagerly. "Joe's never been taught to care or consider any one else," she went on, forgetting that by so saying she might seem to be reflecting on Will's method of "bringing up" his brother. "Joe doesn't show his feelings—affection," she stammered, "as readily as most people."

"I doubt if there's much to show," Will answered, slowly. "It's a bitter thing for me to say. Joe's all I've got, and I care more for him than I knew; but the fact remains he's showing very little consideration for my feelings, or for yours," he added, determinedly, having made up his mind that Sandy had better hear this from him than from some stranger.

"For mine?" questioned Sandy, coolly looking at him through a strand of red hair that had fallen down over her eyes. "Joe doesn't owe me—any consideration. I showed him—very little."

Will stood watching her brush back the lock with a quick, impatient movement, and then continued. "Haven't you heard the latest town gossip about Beatrice Bunn?"

"Well?" said Sandy, steadily enough, considering how the blood was beating against her temples.

"Her brother Clarence admitted to me that Joe loaned him the money to enable Beatrice to realize her—ambitions."

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"Joe was always generous," said Sandy, faintly, "and Beatrice has talent."

"I think it is you who are generous." And Will put a kindly hand on her shrinking shoulder. "Try to forget him, Sandy. He isn't worth such—loyalty."

"It isn't loyalty," Sandy managed to say. "It's just—just that I know Joe better than any one else—in the world, and I'm not very good—at forgetting."

Somehow she managed to get out of the room without breaking down, and sat still at her desk for a long time, wondering how much the girls knew by this time, and whether they would begin questioning her when she got home. If they did, could she stand it?

When she got home she found the girls so excited about a quarrel between Mr. Martin and his nephew, Leonard, that they had thoughts and tongues for nothing else.

For a long time past Leonard and his uncle had had nothing in common but the Sandisons. Leonard found his work at the bank dull, and daily it grew more irksome.

Mr. Martin meanwhile grew more and more annoyed at the boy's lack of enthusiasm for what to him was the most fascinating of games, "making money." Leonard wanted to make something besides money, and grew impatient at the restraint his uncle put upon him, and vowed aloud to Nancy and the girls that he wouldn't stand it much longer. They were his only sympathizers. The Egyptians to a man approved Mr. Martin's conduct and wondered at Leonard's "foolishness."

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That very afternoon he had come posting up to Meadowbanks, all excitement over a letter he had had from an old friend of his dead father. This man, pleased with some designs Leonard had made for him, proposed that Leonard work for him in his decorator's shop and betweenwhiles attend the Academy of Fine Arts. It wouldn't pay him much more than just enough to keep him in food, clothes, and paints; but it was Philadelphia, and he could live there more cheaply than in New York, and it would be such a chance. Leonard felt he couldn't afford to delay much longer. He was twenty-three, and would never make a good banker. If he waited too long he would spoil his chance of becoming a good painter.

He was hot and excited over the matter, and had just fully declared his sentiments in a loud tone to his friends when they heard an angry, "Is that so, sir?" and there was Mr. Martin standing in the doorway!

There had been no escape for Leonard or the girls, and Mr. Martin in a hard, angry voice, none the less angry because it wasn't raised but rather sunk below its usual pitch, told Leonard that, such being the case, his house was no longer a home for him. He could pack his things at once and start on his chosen career without delay.

Leonard, equally stiff and passionate, had thanked him and said he would do so at once, and had risen to go; but Mr. Martin turned and left the house first.

Although Libbett, his favorite, ran after him, she could not move or make him listen to her pleading. "He's acting just like a bad old uncle in a

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story-book," she wailed, sorrowfully, after he had gone, "and I can't make him see it."

Presently Leonard, very white and with a hard look about his mouth, returned to say good-by. He wasn't going to stay another night in his uncle's house. He had packed up his belongings. He was going—at once.

It was into this that Sandy walked, and when she understood the situation added her voice to the general entreaty that at least he stay and dine with them. Leonard steadily refused. He blamed himself as it was for having made their house the scene of his quarrel with his uncle. He seemed to fear that they would antagonize his uncle if they were kind to him. The girls stoutly declared—what proved to be the truth—that Mr. Martin's sense of justice was too great not to understand that they could like him and yet sympathize with Leonard. Mrs. Mac went so far as to promise peach ice-cream, for which she was famous, as a crowning proof of her loyalty, if Leonard would only stay; but Leonard wouldn't.

Just then Micky walked in, laid hold of Leonard, and claimed him as his guest. In the morning Len might go his way, but not before.

"How did you know?" asked the astonished Leonard.

"Libbett wrote me," said Micky, smiling over at that demure damsel, who was leaning against Nancy's shoulder, watching them all quietly.

"I wrote the note while you were all talking—so," announced Libbett, quietly, "and Mr. Smith, the milkman, waited and took it down to Micky when I told him how important it was."

MORE UPHEAVAL'S

"I just knew Micky would let him stay with him," crooned Georgina, swinging on Micky's arm. "I told Libbett so, and it's a nice friendly place to stay, Len, and Micky's a good friend to you, and so are we all."

Micky grinned down at Georgina and seemed to consider that this convincing argument clinched things.

It seemed to "finish" Leonard, for his good-bys were very husky.

The girls trembled when Mrs. Mac flung her arms about his neck and kissed him soundly, calling him her "puir forsaken laddie"; but, to their astonishment, Leonard not only didn't mind, but seemed to like it.

He went away with Micky, looking almost cheerful, and Libbett ran after him down the drive and whispered that she was going up to the house tomorrow and "make Uncle Martin be nicer" to him.

She did go, but Uncle Martin, although he was as nice as ever to Libbett, refused to "be nicer" to Leonard.

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IT was all very well to keep up at first; but afterward when the excitement died away, and months of silence gradually forced Sandy to the conclusion that neither Joe nor Tommy seemed disposed to let her know where they had gone or what they were doing, Sandy surrendered herself for a time to her feelings.

After Beatrice's sensational exit the Bunns had moved from town, and neither Will Drayton nor any one else heard the slightest word from the run-aways.

The town, of course, was full of rumors, and Nancy, who had never approved of Joe and was secretly relieved that he had gone, half hoped the latest rumor—that Joe had married Beatrice Bunn—was true. Nancy felt that she would be glad to know Joe had gone out of Sandy's life for ever.

She kept this view strictly to herself, however, as Sandy's case was a difficult one to handle. If Sandy had had less to do and more time to spend on herself she might have fancied herself heart-broken. Fortunately for her, she had those about her who took a wholesome view of life in general and refused to let any of the family develop morbid views on any subject. So, despite Sandy's secret

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longing—eighteen and a half is a sentimental age—for a more romantic interpretation of her moods, they were diagnosed as “just glooms.”

Nancy, indeed, had every right to a slight attack herself. It was rather hard to lose Leonard. Egypt's small festivities without that constant swain seemed very flat and dull. Nancy, however, being the head of the house, felt that it was not hers to give way to vain and open regrets; and, besides, Leonard was working manfully and had a hard fight before him, and a cheerful acceptance of things as they were was the best way to help him out.

To Libbett Sandy's moods were causing great perturbation. Libbett had always felt that Sandy was her especial charge. Now the anxious Libbett felt that something must be done, and only waited for the opportunity to enlist Nancy in the cause.

“Sandy has the glooms too constant-like to make her pleasant to live with just now,” Nancy remarked to Libbett, as they sat out on the lawn together one Sunday afternoon. “Where is she now?” she added.

“Shut up in her own room,” answered Libbett.

“What is she doing?”

“I don't know. Probably lying on her bed worrying about life in general, and Joe Drayton in particular.”

There was a little pause. “What she ever saw in Joe—” Libbett began again.

“That's one of the things that never have been understood since the world began,” interrupted Nancy, sagely. “Everybody's family always wonders what one sees in—”

“Oh, Nancy,” interrupted Libbett, with an ear-

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nestness that robbed the interruption of any rudeness, "tell me what to do about Sandy?"

"Oh, let her work out of the glooms herself."

"But these have lasted a prodigious time," objected Libbett. "Whole weeks of monosyllabic answers; shadows under her eyes; going to bed anywhere from half past seven to nine—and locking her door!"

"Well," said Nancy, judicially, "if one is going in for undiluted blues in this family it is as well to lock the door."

Then she sighed: "I don't know what to do, and that's the truth."

"She has refused to go to two parties," continued Libbett.

"That doesn't count with a Sandison," Nancy answered, laughing. "You know that quite as well as I do. We all grumble at going to parties and sneak out of them when we can, though when we do go we have the best time of anybody there."

"Don't we just!" said Libbett, reminiscently.

"Did you ask Sandy why she refused to go?"

"She said Butterbeans made her sick the first time," Libbett admitted.

"Well, I don't blame her." And Nancy laughed as a vision of Butterbeans rose before her. "He's got it very badly. He acts like a moon-sick calf."

"Butterbeans" was a young Boston engineer, the son of one of Mr. Martin's friends, who was staying in Egypt, and with Mr. Martin, while he finished a post-graduate course at Columbia. To his first nickname, the obvious one of "Beans," given him on account of his birthplace, his ultra New England accent and views, had speedily been added that of

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"butter," for, as Geordie kindly put it, "He's soft as butter about Sandy."

"Isn't it pitiful how Mr. Martin tries to pretend he doesn't miss Len, now, because he has the Boston one?" said Libbett.

"And Leonard getting on so swimmingly," sighed Nancy. "I wanted awfully to show his last letter to Mr. Martin, but didn't quite dare."

"Tell me, and I'll tell him," said Libbett, promptly. "But we were on the subject of Sandy."

"Oh yes. First party refused owing to Butterbeans. Second party?"

"Refused because she said she was tired of Egypt's parties. They were all the same."

"There's something in that," Nancy agreed. "They are awfully samey."

"Sandy says it isn't so in every place," Libbett went on, "but she knows everybody in Egypt, just who dances well and who treads on your toes; just exactly what they will say to her, and—oh, there's no novelty for Sandy in place, program, or people."

"Mercy! She was severe, wasn't she?"

"Severe isn't the word. She was violent; but there's a lot of truth in what she said. I say, Nancy—" and then Libbett hesitated.

"Well?" And Nancy looked up from the magazine she had begun to cut.

"Nancy, since we have a little extra money, owing to your increase of salary and my teaching money this month, couldn't we—give a party ourselves?"

"We are just beginning to get along smoothly, and parties cost," warned Nancy.

"I know," said Libbett, quickly; "but we might get up something different. Take Egypt back with

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us to the simple life. See if we can't have a party without much dressing and without dancing," she added, doubtfully, "if Mrs. Mac makes a fuss about our old carpets. Get Sandy interested, and see if she can't think up a good idea."

"Yours are better," suggested Nancy.

"Maybe, but let's try Sandy's this time," urged Libbett.

"Oh, you think that would disperse the glooms?"

Then, as Nancy noted how anxious Libbett's face had become she leaned over and patted her hand.

"You take Sandy too seriously, Libbett."

"I don't think so. I think it is—serious."

Nancy closed her magazine and looked in front of her, drawing her brows together. "I suppose it is, but what more can we do?"

"If only one of us had really liked Joe," mourned Libbett, "Sandy could get rid of some of her feelings confiding; but, you see, she has to keep them all to herself."

"Just as well," sniffed Nancy. "I never believe in talking over—those things."

"Well, we might try the party," she agreed, finally. "Suppose we figure out now how many people we can have comfortably—or will have to ask, anyway, for politeness' sake—and then see if we can afford ice-cream."

They were still busy calculating when Micky strolled up. A rather lonely Micky who required comforting, since both Joe and Lenny were gone.

The party was brought forward instantly as a means of distracting his attention.

The thought of any festivity raised instant response in Micky's breast.

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"Let's get Old Redhead down here to devise some new features," he urged. Although he liked the other girls much better, really, than Sandy, still as an inventor of mischief and fun Sandy was fully appreciated by Micky.

"Don't know whether she will come or not," hesitated Libbett.

"Gloomed up?" questioned Micky.

"Enshrouded in the deepest gloom," answered Nancy. "Micky, go tell Mrs. Mac we'd love to have our tea out here this afternoon, and see if she will stir up Sandy."

Mrs. Mac refused. "I'll hae naething to do with yon red-heided tawpie," she declared, firmly. "O' a' the ill-conditioned, bad-tempered lassies, thon's the warst. Here, Mister Conry—"

"Oh, call me Micky," begged that young man. "I've asked you that a hundred times. Call me Mick, dear Mrs. Mac, and let me know you love me."

"No me," Mrs. Mac answered, decidedly. "I'll hae naething to do wi' the Irish. Tak' a wee currant-cakie, laddie."

Micky went away laughing and munching the currant-cake, only pausing to tumble Georgina out of the big hammock, where she was reposing engrossed in the latest Sunday-school library book, an ancient tale of Miss M. E. Braddon's. Egypt's library had recently received a donation of books from a larger town. It is to be supposed that some of the selectors had either catholic taste or very little discretion in books for the young. Nancy had already wrested from the unwilling Georgina a tale of love and passion which was considered unsuited

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to her tender years. "It couldn't possibly hurt me," Georgina had pleaded. "I don't even know what it's talking about, Nancy, but the language is perfectly delightful and instructive."

"So I perceive," said Nancy, having heard Georgina request Libbett to move her "rounded and womanly form" from a chair which Georgina wanted.

After the tumble an animated chase round the house was stopped by an angry call from Mrs. Mac.

"Georgina, yon's no behavior for the Sabbath. Come you here, and thon wild Irishman wi' ye, and carry oot the tea. That 'll employ your feckless bodies, onyway. Guid kens if ye have ony minds, either o' ye."

Mrs. Mac always disapproved of everybody on Sundays, it being a day when active housework was suspended, and eating and drinking had an undue share of her attention. The cause, if people would only stop and consider, of half the "Sunday misery and boredom" which some people complain of so bitterly.

After setting down the tea-tray carefully and designating just what chair should be reserved for him—for by this time several other young people had strolled up from the village—Micky went round to the side of the house. Stationing himself directly under Sandy's window, he began singing, "My lady sweet, arise," until the persecuted damsel, who loved Micky's voice, but not as he was using it now, looked from her window.

"Oh, go away, Micky, there's a good boy. I'm dull to-day."

"We are dull without you," Micky called back to her. "Put on whatever duds you've taken off,

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Sandy. I can't see anything from here, of course, or I'd specify, and, having beautified yourself, come on down. We want to talk over something new."

"I don't want—" Sandy began.

But Micky, the-tactful-when-he-wanted-to-be, called up: "Those Rathbun girls are hovering in sight. For pity's sake don't let them think you're gloomed about Joe and this rumor that he's married Beatrice Bunn! That's what they've come to find out."

"I'll be down in a minute," Sandy said, hastily. "Unless—is Butterbeans there?"

"No," said Micky, jesuitically. He wasn't there; but if Micky wanted to he could see him coming through the fields from the Martin place, but Micky didn't want to, consequently didn't see him until he arrived.

"Sandy's coming down," he whispered hurriedly to Georgina. "Couldn't Libbett ditch those Rathbun girls?"

"Not right away," answered Georgina. "They're so deathly anxious to meet Butterbeans. He can't bear them," she confided, giggling. "I heard him tell Nancy they were so provincial. I'm going to ask Libbett to ask him to show them the Brook-path."

"There are moments, Georgina," breathed Micky, softly, "when I gaze at you dumb with admiration."

"Only moments?" sneered Georgina, feeling very grown up, for both the sneer and the retort were plucked bodily from the aforesaid Sunday-school library book.

"They are long moments," Micky answered, amused; but Georgina, still playing she was grown

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up, was saying, "One lump or two?" to Butterbeans with all the airs and graces of a society woman. Micky wasn't quite sure whether she had heard him or not.

Just then Sandy sauntered on the scene, only to find that Butterbeans was there, bent on including her in every look, speech, and action. She pounced on the perfidious Micky and used him as a shield and buckler between her and the enemy, until the unwary Butterbeans found himself, he knew not how, taking the Rathbun girls home. He, finding them very "provincial" indeed, became ultra-Bostonese in speech and manner, little knowing that instead of chilling them to the marrow, as he meant, he was delighting them beyond words. They were finding Mr. Elliott C. Bliss, which was Butterbeans' real name, "so cultured."

After what Georgina, still under the influence of that misleading library book, called "the vulgar rabble" had departed, the family and Micky sat down to "real tea," as Geordie insisted on calling the supper Mrs. Mac spread before them.

Nancy and Libbett, having figured out the essentials—namely, that they would ask So-and-so and spend so-much, used all their efforts to get Mrs. Mac's consent to their party.

At the first mention of it Mrs. Mac laid down the big black teapot with such a slam that Nancy trembled for the precious old glazed tile they used as a stand.

"Party in this hoose! I'll no hear tell o' sic' a thing!" she thundered. "Fine ye ken I'll no. I wish yer mother was here to hear o' the like."

"Mother loved parties," Libbett reminded her, patting Mrs. Mac's plump, work-worn hand.

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"In moderation. I ken that," said Mrs. Mac, her desire for the exact truth getting the better of her desire to make them all suffer for trying to "spring sic' a thing on her, and wi' strangers at the table."

"But I'm not a stranger, Mrs. Mac," and Micky smiled engagingly at her. "I try my best to be a son to you."

"Awa' east and west wi' ye," Mrs. Mac said. Then, conscience-stricken when she saw she had made "her girls" feel badly: "It's no as if I was against any proper pleasures. It's no as though ye werena oot o' mournings this long whiley back and couldna do it properly—"

This was a side of Mrs. Mac on etiquette that the girls found hard to bear. Whatever the color of their gowns, they would never cease to love or to miss Mother, so why should Mrs. Mac and other ancient ladies always talk about "respect"?

"It's nae use talking," Mrs. Mac went on. "Nane o' ye are auld enough to understand what it would mean tae me to see a hale jing-bang o' young folk rampaging and dancing on that front-room cairpet. Guid kens it was auld enough when it was pit doon, and a' these years havena improvit it. I'm jist fair worn oot patching and turning it, and you'd invite a wheen o' Egypt bodies, wi' heaps o' money, wha wadnae pit the like of thon doon on the floor o' their kitchens."

"Why, Mrs. Mac!" Georgina indignantly cried. "It's a very fine Brussels carpet. Micky's often admired it, and they've got lots of pretty rugs and things in his own house, too. Haven't you, Micky?"

"I think it's a jim-dandy carpet," Micky honestly affirmed.

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"You can't see the mends, except in a very bright light," Libbett said, soothingly.

"If they don't like our carpets, let 'm lump 'em!" shouted the indignant and disgusted Geordie. "If it's good enough for us, it's good enough for any old Egyptian."

"Hush, Geordie!" Nancy commanded. "Try to remember that you are at the supper-table, not playing baseball."

Geordie having subsided, Nancy turned to the older girls, who were considering, not the age of the carpet, which was self-evident, and besides they were all of Geordie's opinion, but the fact that Mrs. Mac took it so hard.

"A wheen o' harum-scarum lassies and lads stamping and roaring and dropping crumbs all over my floors, and likely breaking some o' the furniture," she mourned.

"For goodness' sake, Micky," begged Nancy, "explain to Mrs. Mac that it is the *élite* of Egypt we mean to invite, not a gang of roughs, while I think of some other scheme."

"I've got one," announced Sandy, who had been thinking hard. "If you and Libbett only approve, Nance, it will be a solution of all our difficulties."

"Say on," said Nancy, resignedly.

"We will give our party out of doors," explained Sandy, breathlessly. "It will be a simple party, as far as clothes go, for both girls and men. Just summer things—white for both. Every girl has a white dress or blouse and skirt of some kind, and, as they can be washed, nothing will be spoiled by grass and trees and things."

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"Make it easy for the chaperon, too," volunteered Micky, grinning.

"Precisely," said Sandy, smiling back at him. "We will borrow Martin's woods."

"That's three miles or more frae this hoose," interrupted Mrs. Mac, "and they've all to be fed, mind you that. Ye dinna get ony o' my chiney or naipkins, tae dae it wi'."

"We will have Japanese napkins," Sandy went on, soothingly, "and wooden pie-plates, and throw them on the fire when we are through, and we will take only kitchen cups with us and have just sandwiches, coffee, and cake. All easy to serve. The coffee we will make right there in a big tin pail on the fire, and it will be moonlight—and—"

She was stopped by a chorus of enthusiastic suggestions.

"But we can't dance in the wood," Libbett finally made herself heard above the friendly din. "Won't it be rather stupid after supper? Games are a—well, just a bit babyish."

"That's where you all come in," Sandy said. "After we have eaten everybody will sit in a circle just in front of those three big oaks. You remember them, Micky. We went there one night, you and—and Joe and I. Don't you? We said it looked like a stage setting."

"Oh yes," answered Micky. "Bully clear space, and the moon comes up like a moon on the stage."

"It will be," Sandy said. "After supper all those who do not perform will sit in a semicircle and listen while we give a varied musical program and a play."

"Oh, I say!" Micky shouted. "Ripping idea!"

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There was a general pleased agreement, and then difficulties began to present themselves.

These Sandy brushed aside. "Micky will sing, and so will Libbett, if we ask them prettily."

They both agreed. But what about accompaniment? You can't take a piano into the woods?

"That's why I am announcing it to you thus early in the game," replied Sandy. "You are to get some simple old-fashioned negro melodies and—and things like that, and sing them to Butterbeans' guitar."

"Butterbeans and a guitar!" The girls began to laugh.

"Why don't you say a young pipe-organ and be done with it?" asked Micky, convulsed. "He looks much more like a performer on that august instrument than—"

"He is one of the best in the glee club," Sandy interrupted, "so get used to the idea. He does not play it with his face. He'll probably bring out two other mandolin and guitar players from Columbia if I say the word."

"Oh, say it!" begged the girls.

"Nancy," said Georgina, leaning forward, clutching Micky's sleeve for moral support, and watched anxiously by Phyllis and Geordie. "We will be allowed to stay up, won't we? Sandy 'll want us to help, and it's out of doors."

Her voice almost rose to a wail at the last word.

Nancy looked dubious. "You are pretty young. I don't believe in children at parties."

"We'll carry pails and things," Geordie insinuated.

"I'm only twelve, but I'm so tall I can look sixteen if Sandy 'll loan me one of her white skirts," Phyllis said, hopefully.

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"We will see. Don't bother now, children. I want to say one thing to Sandy, and that is: it's pretty hard to get any simple, pretty play that will be good for amateurs out of doors. The play will be the hard thing, Sandy. If we go into costumes it will make the whole thing elaborate. We want the right out-of-door spirit, you know, the right number of people; the scenery must fit—and we can't bother with elaborate costumes, so—" Nancy shook her head doubtfully.

"I know," Sandy answered, confidently. "Don't worry. If I can't find a play I'll write one."

She did.

Libbett was the only one who knew about that, and Libbett, first having pronounced it "wonderful," promised to say that it was written by "a friend of hers" who had loaned them the typewritten manuscript and parts.

This was to explain why none of the ordinary little printed copies of the play were handed round, as was customary in Egypt's select dramatic society.

The moon did all the almanac promised for it the night of the party. It rose bright and early and streamed down on the wide road that led to Martin's woods until it looked like an enchanted pathway and the woods themselves like a part of Elfland.

Sandy, who had refused all part in the play, sat back in the shadow and clinched the hand that did not hold the prompt-book tightly, her heart in her mouth.

It went smoothly. It was a simple little comedy, and the first ripple of laughter was balm to Sandy's heart, which stopped beating double-quick and went back to normal,

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The play required only the scenery which nature had provided and the costumes of the day, so Micky, Nancy, Libbett, Milly Farwell, Horace and Jack Warren strolled on as they were, and spoke out, as Mrs. Mac audibly remarked, "Very weel indeed, and awfu' plain-like."

When it ended everybody praised the performers and said, "What a sweet little play!"

"I say," Butterbeans began, edging up to Sandy, after it was all over and the performers were being congratulated, "that was a good little thing. Where did you get hold of it? It would do for the club, when I go back to Boston. Who wrote it?"

"A girl—a friend of Libbett's," stammered Sandy, quite unnerved at Boston's tribute to her first attempt.

"Pretty clever girl. Ever done anything else?"

"No—not that I know of."

"Ought to be encouraged," said Butterbeans, judicially. "I suppose, though, she's been spoiled and told she's a genius."

"I don't think so," Sandy managed to say. "Nobody's said much to her—yet."

"Well, she's undoubtedly clever. With hard work she might amount to something. If—if the author's a friend of yours, Miss Sandy—why, I'll send a copy of the play to Uncle. He's always on the lookout for new writers."

"She—she doesn't want to write plays. She wants to write novels," Sandy explained. "Big ones," she added, modestly.

"Whatever she wants to write, Uncle could help her. He's editor-in-chief, you know."

"It's awfully good of you," Sandy said, gratefully;

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for the first time looking at Butterbeans with truly appreciative eyes. He was a nice fellow after all, even if he— "I'll ask Libbett to—tell her," she said aloud.

Fortunate Sandy! Providence had given her something new to think of and do.

She had been delighted and amazed at the success of her little play; but had likewise seen, in the playing, even before this uncritical audience, how crude it was. She had made up her mind then and there to write and write until she could do what she wanted to—with words. Some day she would be able to make people laugh, and cry, and laugh again, if she wrote—as she meant to write.

Maybe she thought reverently as she walked home with the pleased Butterbeans and allowed him to do all the talking—if she didn't grow too hard and bitter about things that happened she might be allowed to do this. It might even be that things happened to one, so that one could know how other people felt. When she became famous she would make heaps of money and give it all to the family, and far-away Tommy and Joe would hear of it and marvel.

Anyway, whatever happened, she would try. It would keep her from thinking too much about herself. Already Sandy was learning that self-pity is the greatest poison in life. Nothing so surely numbs every faculty, stops all worthy effort.

Butterbeans went home happy, having found Miss Sandy so sympathetic, never dreaming that she had heard scarcely a word of what he had said.

That very night Libbett told all the family about the play and its author, and there was a chorus of "I-thought-so's" mingled with hearty praise.

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"H'mm," said the night-gowned Phyllis, appearing in the upper hallway and gazing scornfully down on her elders, who had not yet mounted the stairs; "I thought all the time that silly thing the loveress said in the play sounded awfully like something I heard Sandy say herself, one day, when I was leaning out the back window and she was going down the brook path with—"

"To bed wi' ye!" thundered Mrs. Mac. "Never will I be able to get ye oot o' yer beds the morn. Fine I ken wi' a' this encouragement that lassie's heid 'll be turnt. There'll be naething bit baskets fu' o' waste-paper and scraps o' writings all ower the room frae this day forth."

Mrs. Mac was right. Sandy sat at the table now with an abstracted air, went directly to her room and burned the midnight gas as long as fatigue and her sisters would permit. Only now they knew it was not glooms, but writing, so they did not worry.

When it came to having the compositions read them, however, it was a very different matter. A family council was called, and it was unanimously decided that, as all plays were tried first on "the dog," Libbett as evincing, whether false or real, the most lively interest in Sandy's career, was hereby elected "Fido-in-chief."

"For life," Georgina modestly suggested, which amendment was adopted instantly.

The duty of said Fido-in-chief was to hear first all compositions proceeding from the aforesaid Sandy's aforesaid pen, pencil, or typewriter, and having heard, and after mature judgment decided that they were fit for the family mind and morals,

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should thereupon read the same to said family, and the said family would try to endure it.

"Providing, always," amended Nancy, "said reading is *not* emotional."

Libbett, with due humility, accepted the office.

There were no more glooms, for Sandy took to writing in earnest.

Butterbeans, the hitherto despised, blossomed out in this literary atmosphere. He prodded up Uncle. Uncle read the play. He said it was fairly so-so for a beginner. Then, after a bit, he wrote his devoted nephew that one of their literary editors wanted a young woman to take hold of some of the work, write book-reviews, specials, and generally help him out. The salary was not very large. It was more than Sandy was earning then, but she did not tell Butterbeans so. Would Sandy care to try?

Butterbeans' eyes glistened as he made the offer, for he was scheduled to go to Boston himself very soon now.

Sandy didn't see the glitter—or pretended not to. She said "yes," eagerly, the family having decided that it was a chance she should not miss.

It was hard leaving home; still it would be the best thing for Sandy in the end if she really wished to write.

With a trunk full of manuscript and the family's clothes, Sandy went on her way. The girls gave of their garments freely, for Sandy would never shop or keep her clothes looking decent long. She took with joy a second-hand gown of Nancy's or Libbett's and wriggled into it somehow. It meant more time for writing, so much less spent on dressmakers. Yet Sandy, be it known, loved clothes.

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Her face wreathed in smiles lest the girls guess how forlorn she really felt, she waved her good-bys. She had never been so far from home before.

"What she'll do about hairpins I don't know," said Libbett, thoughtfully. "I can only hope her friends will be kind. Sandy has no conscience about nice, shiny hairpins."

"Gee! the Cathedral will seem spooky without her!" Geordie pensively remarked. Sandy for purposes of solitude had lately adopted a huge third-floor room, called The Cathedral because there was no heat in it. Geordie's room was directly below. "She'll get herself good and disliked," he went on to say, "if she drops her shoes down hard every night on any one else's head."

"It 'll certainly seem queer without her," sighed Nancy; "but it's undoubtedly good for her character."

Mrs. Mac, who had gone to the gate to wave her apron, and lingered behind the rest, now came back, her mouth firmly pursed.

"Mark my words," she said, "thon red-heided lassie 'll never stand it. Not thon cald thrawn Boston, after being used to the like o' us every night o' her life. Guid food, too, though I say it as shouldn't. Hamely like, but weel cooked. Her to sit doon till a boarders' table, contented like? She'll never! Na! Na! She's no the persevering kind. She'll be back within the week."

.."

XIV

HOME AGAIN

BUT it was five whole years before Sandy came home to "really stay."

Of course, she had taken short trips home, and the girls had gone to see her in Boston whenever there were available funds; but now, by dint of hard work and harder saving, Sandy was going to take six months' "leave."

She did not whisper it out loud for fear it might not come true; but if things worked out as she hoped they would she might never go back at all.

Not that she hadn't liked Boston and the magazine people. They had been perfectly splendid, and she had had a beautiful time; and she knew, at last, something about how to write.

What she wanted to find out was whether she could write, and this six months at home was to see if she had it in her to finish her novel.

Night after night those boarding-house pictures, "The Huguenot Lovers" and "At the Spring," had stared down on a red-headed girl who worked on, wondering if she was a fool to give up parties and fun just to sit in an attic room and write on a second-hand typewriter.

About 2 A.M. this view of the literary career is very depressing; but after breakfast next morning,

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when you snatch a glimpse of the precious pages before you go down-town to the office, it doesn't seem so bad, and Hope springs.

Indeed, in Sandy's heart Hope was always springing. Even though all this time she had never heard a word from Joe or Tommy, she still hoped to. If Sandy had been really practical she would have realized how little Joe and Tommy counted in her general scheme of life now; but Sandy lived in glorious day-dreams of fame and fortune, in which Joe and Tommy figured largely in the admiring crowd. Real recognition being slow to arrive, Sandy fed herself on dreams.

Meantime at home lots of things had been happening. Georgina had graduated from high school long ago, finished a kindergarten training course, and was revolutionizing Egypt's idea of infant education.

Wasn't it wonderful that Georgina had been able to pass the examinations, seeing that no one had ever caught her in the act of studying? Geordie's theory that the knowledge soaked through while she slept on the books seemed as good as any other; and the deepest books were handed the gay Georgina, with the solemn request: "Sleep on that and tell me what it's all about?"

Phyllis was going to the School of Design. Phyllis was a very talented as well as a very good-looking young lady nowadays, although her sisters persisted in calling her, to her indignation, "Little Phylly." It was enough, she said indignantly, to dwarf any one; but as she stood five feet ten in her stockings, Mrs. Mac pointed out sniffingly that there was "no fear."

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Libbett's voice was growing more and more beautiful with years and use, and Mr. Martin predicted great things for "his little girl," whose only flaw was that she was so firm in the defense of The Absent One, as the girls called Leonard. Leonard, by the way, was absent only in name, having formed a with-Micky-every-week-end habit which did not deceive the gentle Micky.

Nancy, who, goodness knows, had enough on her hands attending to things in general and the family in particular, had announced that she had no idea of spending her life in an office, and together with a kindred spirit had started a woman's magazine which bid fair, if they could keep it alive for another six months, to be a great success.

Will Drayton and Alan were anxious to "back" the enterprising founders, but the two women had refused to add greatly to their indebtedness. If the thing was more than a "fad" it would support itself presently, and it looked as though it would. It was a tremendous piece of work for Nancy, who was editor-in-chief; the other partner, Miss Milligan, a keen, clever woman of fifty, being general business manager.

If it continued to prosper Nancy was going to give up her position in town and devote herself entirely to the magazine. They were publishing it in Egypt, because rent and help were cheaper and it was easier for Nancy.

Mrs. Mac wrung her hands over the whole business. "It's no chancey," she said, "a lass trying to do a man's wark. Ye're a' far too clever as it is. Ye'll find yerselfs on the shelf like thon Miss Milligan."

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"I'd rather be like Miss Milligan than any other woman of her age I know," suddenly spoke up the leisurely Georgina, from the depths of the hammock. "She's a nice-looking, well-bred woman, and she's got something so interesting to do that people are glad to see her and talk to her; and she doesn't have to pretend she's young. Nobody minds anyway as long as you're interesting. Her clothes are pretty, too, and she cares about them," she added, approvingly.

"Why, Georgina!" said Phyllis, looking up from the design she had spread all over the floor of the piazza. "You told me yesterday you meant to marry."

"If I find the right man I don't mind trying it," said Georgina, kindly and pleasantly. "But there are lots worse fates than being an old maid. I've seen 'em. They're women who married for a home, women who married for money, women who married just to escape being old maids, and, oh! women who have married for anything—but love."

"Weel, av a' the arrogant lassies!" exclaimed the indignant Mrs. Mac. "D'ye mean tae say—"

"I mean to say," continued Georgina, quietly settling herself back in the hammock, "that I'll take a look around me before I decide. There are several million men I haven't seen—yet."

The family wrote that they must have Sandy home soon. They wanted to find out if she had grown "too literary" to live with, and whether Nancy and she could get along together under the same roof.

Of course, Nancy's stuff was different; but it was writing, and it had always been the theory that one literary light in a household is enough.

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Also they wanted to hear about Butterbeans. For Butterbeans, having finally realized that Sandy meant "No," and nothing else, had decided she was hard and unfeminine and had taken unto himself a wife. Sandy had gone to his wedding, and the girls wanted to know, of course, how that ceremony had impressed her.

Most of all they wanted to tell her all about Alan's engagement. Alan was engaged to a wonderful girl in Chicago, as pretty as a picture, and almost, in his sisters' opinion, good enough for Alan.

When the 11.50 from New York stopped at Egypt one fine morning early in July a young woman, smartly dressed, with a pretty hat and a large manuscript portfolio, got off. She smiled and nodded to some half-dozen people, and shook hands with several more, especially with the expressman, whom she assured that she wasn't married yet in answer to his anxious inquiry, and received with composure his gracious: "Plenty o' time, of course. You ain't gone off any yet." Sandy then modestly asked him to look after her trunk, refused his offer to "take that there case along too," and took the road toward Meadowbanks.

It was Saturday, and all the family would be home, she thought gleefully as she turned into the drive.

A leggy lad of sixteen shot around the corner of the house, closely pursued by a young goddess with a long braid of golden-brown hair streaming behind her and a kitchen mop raised in her strong right hand, ready to hurl the youth to the ground.

Catching sight of Sandy, Geordie yelled: "No fair swatting me now, Phylly, for here's the author!"

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With a joyous whoop he fell upon Sandy, gave her a hasty brotherly kiss which landed somewhere between her eyes and her nose, grabbed her bag, and went shouting toward the house.

"What ho! Within there! Within there! What ho! Here's the famous Alexandria Victoria Hugo Sandison at her ancestral gates!"

As Sandy emerged from a tremendous hug administered by the tall and vigorous Phyllis, who had dropped the mop and seized her, the front door burst open and Georgina, a dust-cap over one ear, a very oily gingham apron tastefully draped over her form, an oily duster in her hand, and crude oil and dirt plentifully besprinkled over her countenance and hands, made a dash for Sandy.

After her, dish-towel in hand, came Libbett and the slightly floury but otherwise immaculate Nancy.

"Mind my new coat, Georgina," called Sandy, hurriedly, as, oily rag on high, Georgina advanced upon her.

"I can live without kissing you," murmured Georgina, stopping short, a little hurt, "but I feared you would feel neglected."

"I would," said Sandy, quickly. "If you only could—without—" But Geordie and Phyllis had solved the problem. Grasping each an oily hand, which they held high so that it might not touch or soil the immaculate surface of that coat, they solemnly led the giggling Georgina up to Sandy, who, carefully selecting a comparatively clean space on Georgina's extremely handsome but equally smutty countenance, imprinted a chaste salute.

This ordeal over, Georgina sank on the grass, fanning herself with the oily rag and loudly pro-

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claiming that she was as tired as "a goat," because, as she explained, "if that tireless animal ever was tired it would be tireder than anything else."

Geordie joined her with the cry that "cellar work" had made him as tired as "two goats." Phyllis was about to swell the chorus with a complaint as to the frightful tiredness engendered by mopping the kitchen floor when Nancy and Libbett, having cordially greeted the prodigal Sandy, Libbett suggested that lemonade and some of the tea-cakes Nancy had been making "might be nice."

The suggestion met with hearty approval. Sandy sat down on a rug Geordie dragged from the piazza, and while three of the sisters sank down beside her Phyllis and Geordie raced to the house for refreshments.

"Well," sighed Sandy, taking off her hat and gazing at them, "it's lovely to see you all, but why this extra and extraordinary horny-handed-daughters-of-toil appearance? Where's Mrs. Mac?"

"Gone," answered Nancy, sorrowfully. "Gone to see a sick grandniece who lives somewhere oot near Pawtuckie."

"And we can't even get The Hag in to help," groaned Georgina. "Hence these beautiful hands." And she held out a grimy pair.

"Oh, I say," Sandy said, "isn't that too bad?"

"Too bad!" echoed Georgina, wrathfully. "Micky and a few other boys are coming up to play tennis, too."

"Well, we'll be all through by that time," said Libbett, soothingly.

"All through!" exclaimed Georgina, hotly. "Of course we'll be all through; but after oiling down a

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thousand old stairs, how much will I feel like tennis, and those young brutes as fresh as daisies?"

"Georgina," said Nancy, "need you shout? And young men aren't necessarily brutes."

"Not necessarily," Georgina admitted, sweetly, "but generally—even you will admit that, Nancy—generally they are. Ah," she sighed, "here come Hebe and Ganymede."

Phyllis bore the cakes and glasses on a huge japanned tray, while Geordie supported a large pitcher of lemonade in which the ice tinkled deliciously.

"That's the stuff!" And Georgina grabbed the top cake.

"Georgina," said Phyllis, severely, "if you'd waited until the last, then our cakes wouldn't seem to taste of oil."

"It's a healthy taste," Georgina murmured, between mouthfuls. "Haste with the nectar, Ganymede."

"You'll get yours last," Geordie remarked, with a wink at her as he poured out a glass and handed it to Nancy. "Something's got to be done to keep her down, Sandy," he said, grinning. "We can't all be treated like heartbroken swains, can we?"

"No," said Sandy, thoughtfully. "Some new ones, Georgina?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Georgina answered, "and I'm dying of thirst. Hurry up, Geordie."

"The drinks shall go by ages," Geordie replied, serving Libbett. "Cheer up, Georgina; you are next. Don't gulp yours, Sandy and Georgina; wait until we all get our glasses filled and drink to the famous author," which they solemnly proceeded to do.

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"Why are you at home this early hour, Nancy?" asked Sandy, curiously, as she lowered her glass.

"Because I am taking my vacation. I take extra days occasionally, and all Saturdays, instead of my three weeks all at once, you see."

"Not exactly. Please explain."

"Well," Nancy began, but Geordie interrupted.

"To be plain and short with you, Sandy," he said, "Mrs. Mac's railway fare to take her to 'Teenie at Pawtuckie,' an extra large tax bill, and a dentist's bill for yours truly, to say nothing of the new magazine, have made it impossible for Nancy to have that giddy time at Newport with the Astors and Vanderbilts that has been customary each summer. They are sorry, of course," he added, "and so is Nancy; but we don't mind so much. She makes good cake," he concluded, as he bit into his fourth.

"Go slow, Geordie," begged Phyllis; "people are coming up this afternoon, and we have got to have something left for afternoon tea."

"Yes, for peace' sake," said Libbett, "let's have plenty then, and maybe they won't want to stay to real tea," she added, hopefully and inhospitably. "It means so many dishes when there's no one to help."

"If Dr. Morland comes," remarked Geordie, sagely, "he will have his sitting-down brecks on all right, and he will stay mooning, looking at Phyllis until—"

"Shut up!" shouted that irate damsel, impolitely, pushing another cake into his wide-open mouth. "I am sure," she added, turning on the others like an offended Diana, "Dr. Morland doesn't sit any longer than Micky. Micky fairly lives here."

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"Ah, but," Georgina said, calmly, "Micky loves us all. He doesn't moon over one to the utter boredom of the rest."

"That's the trouble," retorted Phyllis, hotly, as Sandy's lifted eyebrows were answered by a nod from Libbett. "It's hard on any man coming to call in this family. Everybody comes in and expects to be entertained. No other house in Egypt—"

"When," interrupted Nancy's cool voice, "any particular gentleman wishes to see a particular lady he has but to ask for her, and he will see her and her alone. But when a man drives up to the door and asks for 'the Misses Sandison' he shall see all the Misses Sandison. We will not watch eagerly for his preference, and, singling her out, throw her at his head, whatever the accepted Egyptian way of conducting such affairs may be."

Before the impending silence could fall—for never before had any Sandison objected to the mode of hospitality extended in the Sandison home—Sandy's voice arose clear and passionless.

"Would," she asked, mysteriously—"would a contribution of, say, thirty dollars do anything toward relieving the present financial strain, enable us to have The Hag, at least, to wash the dishes and make life in this heated term a little less strenuous?"

"It would only be a sop," answered Georgina, calmly. "We would not get up and roar about it; but, well, such a sop would be acceptable."

"It would be a jolly good thing," asserted Geordie, earnestly. "I need a new tennis-racket."

"It would be possible then, maybe," Phyllis mentioned, still loftily, "for me to get a little figured lawn and make myself something cool."

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"Another creation, you mean," said Georgina, looking at her sister in open admiration. Phyllis not only could design, but had such a "knack" that ten-cent lawn passing through her wonder-working fingers became a thing of beauty, such as more wealthy and fortunate damsels openly envied.

"Thirty dollars," Nancy admitted, "would be a godsend, but where is it?"

"Here," said Sandy, patting her pocket. "I said thirty, but it's forty-five."

"Sandy," murmured Libbett, warningly, "reflect! There's a whole summer to be lived through, and once thrown into the mill there's no getting a dollar of it back."

"Yes," added Nancy; "and you've been pinched enough, goodness knows; you will have to have some things in the fall, and if you spend all your money now, where'll you get them?"

"Allow me to explain," said Sandy, "that this is an 'extra.' I earned it at the last minute by helping two learned professors edit Ben Jonson's plays, so—"

"Oh, Sandy," chorused the entire family, "we can't take your 'extra.'"

"Gee!" said Geordie, sitting up and putting an end to the storm of protests and arguments. "Here's Micky coming now."

"Goodness!" wailed Georgina, as she rose to her feet, "and we're not dressed yet. That comes of Sandy and her tales. Me first to the bath-tub, dear children," she announced, taking the front steps two at a bound. "I'm the dirtiest."

"That's the very reason you should go last," protested Phyllis, following hard behind. "Oh, Nancy, she takes so long."

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"Can't be helped," said Nancy, philosophically. "Take your time, all of you. Micky won't care. There's Sandy to talk to. She looks respectable."

Nevertheless Nancy herself went in to prink after privately announcing to Sandy that the "extra" would be taken and used, but refunded later if practicable.

"How do I look to you, Sandy?" asked Geordie, letting himself down by sections at her feet, as the door closed on Libbett and Nancy.

"Fine!" answered Sandy, when finally he lay prone in all his youthful profusion of leg. "Couldn't be improved on. Grown, haven't you, since last time?"

"An inch or two," agreed Geordie, cheerfully. "Thank Heaven, Alan's a goodly size, for 'Alan's pants fit Geordie now,'" he bellowed, melodiously.

"Geordie!" said Sandy, without trying to stifle her laughter. "You are a bit of a sight as regards shoes, though, aren't you?"

"Why, yes," he admitted, looking at the frightful old things, calmly. "These are the ones I do my cellar work in, which reminds me that all the cellar work isn't finished. Never mind, a Sandy doesn't come home every day, and it would be embarrassing for you to meet Micky alone for the first time, wouldn't it?"

"Not in the least," said Sandy, promptly.

"Well, I'll stay anyway. You never can tell about those things, which reminds me—what do you think of Dr. Morland as a prospective brother-in-law?"

"Why, Geordie!" almost screamed the astonished Sandy. "You don't mean there's anything serious?"

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"Well, I don't know what it is on Phyllis' part," Geordie admitted, with all the wisdom of his sixteen years. "She's a terrible flirt. Half the fellows in town on a string. Georgina could have the other half," he added, loyally, "if she wanted them, but Georgina's different.

"She's a great old Georgy," he went on, with evident enjoyment. "She keeps making soft eyes at 'em until she gets them running after her, and then *she* runs away. She's particular; not every fellow will do.

"But Phyllis!" He shook his head gravely. "Phyllis is awful. She'd make eyes at a—shoe clerk, if there was no one else around, and then be surprised if the fellow acted up on the strength of it. She can't help it, though. She's made so big and striking-looking that everything she does is noticeable. That was why she was chasing me with the mop," he frankly admitted. "I told her a few plain things about being too big to be kittenish. She has had the same advice from Nancy before this, but it doesn't seem to make any impression on her. Now, the way I say things seems to make 'em stick."

"And you think Dr. Morland—?"

"He's got it bad," said Geordie, without a smile, "and it's a bit of a shame, too, if she's egging him along for the fun of the thing. He's a good deal older than the rest of the boys that come around, and if she gives him the same hard slam at the end, he'll get hurt."

"But Phyllis is only eighteen," objected Sandy.

"Well, I can't help that," answered Geordie. "She looks a lot more."

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"Did you really see Micky that time," Sandy asked, doubtfully, "or was that only to see the girls cut and run?"

"No. Truth and honor! He's coming up the road now," Geordie asserted, lifting his head and glancing through the trees. "But he's coming awful slow."

XV

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SO he was, but despite the bent head and his languid walk the heart within that slender body was pumping up blood and mischief to the brain above it, by the square inch, and the blue, dark-lashed Irish eyes were twinkling.

For at luncheon Micky and his father had once more fought over the usual question, Micky's unmarried state.

Mr. Conry was a devout Catholic and a believer in early marriages, and all his other sons had followed his preaching and precepts and were out in the world rearing up families for the state and the Church. Daily his youngest son lived and worked beside him, without apparently giving a thought to the proper course for a man of his age, "with good prospects and a good wage, too." Mr. Conry always wound up his arguments with that.

"My salary," said Micky, calmly, "is scarcely sufficient to keep me as it is, and my position," he added, with an unwinking look at his father, "is so precarious that I wouldn't dare to marry on it. Wasn't I discharged last week?"

His father groaned. What was he to do with this boy? It was a well-known fact among Micky's friends that if tennis or hunting or fishing was particularly alluring, the astute Micky went down-

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town and quarreled with his father, was promptly discharged, and taken on again after a week or two of blissful and whole-souled devotion to the particular recreation then "in season."

"Micky," his father solemnly announced, his tones trembling with the weight of his earnestness, "if you would only marry a good girl of your own faith I'd double your salary and take you on as me partner."

"That's kind of you, Father," replied Micky, really touched. "I'll think it over."

"For how long?" demanded Mr. Conry.

"How can I tell that?" Micky retorted. "I haven't found—the girl yet."

"And how will ye?" burst forth his father, now mounted on his pet grievance and riding it hard. "You that spend all your time, when you're not fishing, eating, drinking, or sleeping, at the feet of a lot of Protestant girls."

"I wish they would let me lie at their feet this weather," Micky grumbled. "But they won't. It's wearing my life out playing tennis with them I'll be all this hot afternoon."

"I thought so," thundered his father. "What good does it do, me toiling with me old hands and brains for the building up of a business to leave ye, and you spending your time with them as can't marry you according to your Church, and whom I will not receive otherwise?"

"Wait until you are asked, Father," came the quiet reply. "The girls are my good friends; and you like them yourself well enough."

"I do," said Mr. Conry, nobly. "They are good girruls, but, as I've been telling ye—"

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"And, as I'm telling you now, Father, they haven't evinced the faintest anxiety to become Mrs. Micky Conry. Not one of them."

He laughed as he finished, but the very sweetness of his voice might have made his father go more carefully and gently if he had noticed it. He did not.

"That they are decent girls I'm not denying," he growled, "so they couldn't be doing the asking themselves. It's yourself that's misleading them. Dangling after them day by day and wasting time that you ought to be using seeking out a nice girl that would suit—everybody. It was Father Kelly and myself was discussing it only yesterday."

"You will leave the Misses Sandison out of your conversation when you discuss me with Father Kelly, or any one else, understand that, Father," said Micky, quickly.

"Sure 'twas he brought them in himself," Mr. Conry went on, blindly. "A pity he thought it that you should be misleading them."

"Misleading them!" Micky echoed, with an angry laugh. "Father, the shoe's on the wrong foot. It's you are misleading yourself. The girls and I are good friends. We will never be anything more."

"'Tis all right, that," muttered Mr. Conry, "when you speak of them as 'girruls,' but which one of them is it you're after? That's what the Father was asking me."

Micky went white and silent for a moment.

"When he next does me the honor to inquire into my personal affairs you can tell him I have such respect for all of them that I would count myself lucky to get any one of them. If I was at liberty

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to marry," he added, smiling openly at his amazed father, "I'd go up the road and take a chance with the first one that opened the door to me. But they don't want me, Father. Can't you believe that?"

"I cannot," said Mr. Conry, grimly. "A good husband's not come by every day."

"That's just it," groaned Micky. "I am a good friend; they know that. But would I be a good husband?"

Micky rose and looked at his father with an odd, unsmiling glance.

"Well, I'll try my fate to-day. I will go up and propose to them, one after another, until I am either accepted by one or rejected by the whole lot; and maybe that will satisfy you, Father."

Before the astonished old man could speak Micky had left the room.

"It's fooling, of course, he is," his father thought, miserably. But he wasn't sure.

Neither was Micky himself when he said it; but the more he thought of it the better he liked the plan. So when he finally came upon Sandy and Geordie sitting cool and smiling under the green trees he plaintively hinted to Geordie that he was perishing with thirst.

"Well," Geordie replied, slowly inching himself to his somewhat untidy feet, "you know, Micky, where the water-pitcher is as well as I do, but I suppose, as you're company, I'll have to get it for you."

As he sauntered off Micky commenced his campaign.

"Of course," he began, in soft, sad tones—"of course, Nancy is the oldest and, properly speaking, I

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ought to begin with her, but then you are the most dangerous. You are going to be a famous writer, soon, I hope, and consequently I run the greatest risk by beginning with you. Who knows but you may need a useful husband to look after your royalties, collect your rents, manage your maid, take your dog out for airings, and fight with critics, editors, and publishers when you need a little free advertising? However, it's a fool who stands shivering on the brink and a wise man who plunges in and gets it over with."

"What are you talking about, Micky?" asked Sandy.

"About you," Micky answered, sweetly. "Would you like to marry me, Sandy?"

"Don't, Micky!" Sandy said, quickly. "Don't joke about—that."

"Well, I'm not. It isn't exactly a joke—is it? I'll be honored, you know, Sandy."

"Thank you," smiled Sandy. "Much obliged, but no. I've got a career. Before Geordie gets back with the water will you be good enough to tell me—why you went to the trouble?"

Micky told her, and together they laughed.

"Where are the rest of the girls?" he asked Geordie, as he intercepted that youth with the water.

"Oh, Nancy's in the kitchen straightening it up," said Geordie, "and Phyllis and Georgina are upstairs buttoning and hooking each other, I guess. Libbett's fixing flowers in the front room. Sandy's here, of course."

"Nancy next," murmured Micky.

"You will come back and report to me, won't you?" begged Sandy.

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"It's a good deal to ask," Micky called back; "but, seeing it's you, Sandy, I will." And he started off for the kitchen.

"What the mischief is he up to now?" Geordie asked, looking after him undecided. "If it wasn't so hot, and Micky wasn't so darned leisurely, I'd go after him and find out; but if he's starting anything it 'll take him hours to get at it. I'd rather tell you, Sandy, about my latest invention."

Sandy, nothing loath, inclined her ear, and the two heads were presently bent over a plan for a wonderful and very cheap wireless apparatus for boys' schools.

"Give the kids no end of a good time setting it up," Geordie said, patronizingly. "Gee! Sandy, I'd been glad when I was the age of some of those little beggars if some one had come along and told me anything like this."

Sandy agreed that it was magnificent and practical. Geordie sighed with satisfaction. "It's a good thing. There's no doubt of it, and now"—he leaned back, putting his curly head in her lap—"if you want to get rid of any choice literary yarns, why, here's your chance."

Meanwhile Micky had made his way to the kitchen and found Nancy scrubbing the white-enameled kitchen table which was their baking-board.

"Why, Micky! What are you doing here? Aren't there any Sandisons to the fore?"

"Oh yes, but I was looking for you, Nancy," and Micky edged himself in, "so I came here. Nice and cool here, isn't it? And you look very domestic, which will help me out."

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"Help you out in what?" asked Nancy, smiling at him.

"My proposal," said Micky, dropping on one knee before her. "Nancy, you have every qualification to make a man supremely happy. Will you—will you—take me?"

"Not seriously." And Nancy laughed and backed away. "If you carry the joke any further you may get water—soapy water—all over your devoted head. Get up, you silly boy, and tell me what it all means."

"It means what I said." And Micky arose, struggling to keep a grin from spreading over his plaintive countenance as he watched Nancy's face. "Wouldn't you like to keep house for me, Nancy?"

"Never," said Nancy. "I should hate it above all things. You'd be too dreamy to appreciate my wonderful creations."

"But I'd always appreciate you, Nancy," Micky replied, "and I never was more in earnest in my life."

"If for a moment," Nancy announced, "I thought you were serious I'd box your ears."

"It's getting pretty serious," Micky murmured. "You are number two."

"Number two what?" asked Nancy, briskly drying off the table. "You talk like a Chinaman acquiring wives with your number one and number two."

"Oh, nothing like that," Micky said, in a shocked voice. "You are number two refusal. But I shall always love you just the same, Nancy, and continue to be a sort of cousinly brother to you."

"Thank you so much, Micky," Nancy responded,

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cordially, "and now would you be kind enough to take yourself out of my clean kitchen and let me finish my work?"

"If you don't mind," Micky said, "I'll just go across the hall. I believe Libbett's in the front room. You won't peek or listen or anything like that, will you?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not for worlds." And Nancy went on with her work. "I've been well brought up."

Libbett had finished arranging the flowers, and was softly playing to herself on the old grand piano as Micky entered the cool, darkened room.

"Don't mind me, Libbett," he called.

"Why, Micky!" said Libbett, rather loudly, as sounds of revelry were wafted from the upper halls, and she feared what she feared, if Phyllis and Georgina took to exchanging confidences across the hall. "Why, Micky!" still more loudly. The laughter upstairs ceased. "What are you doing here? Didn't Sandy and Geordie behave hospitably?"

"Oh yes," Micky sighed. "They were very kind, but I wanted to see you."

"Flattered, I'm sure," said Libbett, puzzled, for, though they were good friends, Micky never sought her society as he did that of the other girls. "What can I do for you?"

"Marry me, if you please," begged Micky, sweetly. "It's the world and all of you, I'd be thinking, you little soft white rose, that you are."

"Michael Conry!" said the scandalized Libbett, as she slipped from the stool and backed up against the piano. "Has the sun been too much for you? Aren't you well?"

"I'm as well as I'll ever be until you give me your

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answer, darlin'." And for the life of him Micky couldn't help his eyes twinkling a little as he used this forbidden word to the proper Libbett, who hated "mush."

"How long will you be keeping me waiting, my brown-eyed mavourneen?" he continued, as the tiny Libbett's dark eyes grew rounder and rounder, and her whole frame shrank away from Michael, who, warming to his work, began to come nearer and nearer.

"Micky," said Libbett, desperately, when she had finally fitted herself into the curve of the piano and could get no farther away from him, "if you come any nearer I'll scream."

"Then you don't care for me?" asked Micky, promptly and mournfully.

"Not a bit," came the instant reply; and then Libbett's heart smote her. "In that way, I mean. I do like you, Micky, very, very much."

"Thanks." And Micky turned away from her quickly, so that she might not see the laughter in his eyes. "Much obliged, but that isn't what I want. Good-by, little girl. I—I'll try—to forget."

"Number three," he said, softly, to himself, as he went into the hall, leaving the astonished Libbett still standing staring after him.

He sat down on the old settle and waited, his shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter as he remembered Libbett's eyes.

Presently Phyllis came down the stairs, a serene young Greek in a white blouse, duck skirt, and tennis-shoes. "Come along, Mick. I'm ready," she announced.

"I don't want to play tennis," Micky answered,

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

following her along the cool hall to the door and stopping there, his back against the wall, looking at her appreciatively. "My, but you are ripping-looking, Phyllis!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you have a goodly cheek, Mick," Phyllis flamed out, "if you think I'm going to stop indoors and listen to that sort of silly talk."

"I have known you," Micky continued, undisturbed, "from your youth up, and I give you my word you were a nasty, self-willed little beggar; but, by George! you've grown up a stunner, and no mistake."

"Well," Phyllis asserted, consciously, "I can't help my looks."

"You can, and you do," Micky went on, evenly. "You put on your things in just the right way, and you know the right sort of colors, and all that sort of rubbish, that make you look a lot better than you really are—"

"Oh, I say," Phyllis began, unfastening the screen door, "when it comes to telling me that I am assisting my looks along and that nature needed assistance in my case, it's more than any girl 'll listen to."

"Wait a minute," Micky pleaded, his hand on the latch. "Phyllis, I've got something to offer you—"

"Little old box of candy for the children?" asked Phyllis, scornfully.

"No," Micky gravely replied "a larger gift, whether as acceptable I leave you to judge. Like to marry me, Phyllis?"

Phyllis dropped the door-latch and came eagerly toward him. "Are you really proposing, Micky?" she said, delightedly.

MICKY PROPOSES

A queer feeling came over Micky as he gazed into the charming gray eyes bent eagerly on him. But Micky was game. "Surest thing you know," he answered.

"Well," said Phyllis, in an awestruck voice, "that's the second one this week." Then she looked at Micky regretfully. "I oughtn't to have said that. The girls don't know."

"I won't tell," Micky promised. "I won't even ask who the other fellow is, but I wish you'd tell me either yes or no, Phyllis."

Phyllis regarded him solemnly, and then with a sweet look of sympathy patted his shoulder. "Too bad, Micky, but it 'll have to be no. You're a good two inches shorter, you know, and a whole lot older, and I haven't stopped growing yet."

Micky looked down, lest his eyes should betray him.

"I like you very much," Phyllis went on, softly; "but it wouldn't really do. Your size—and all. You understand, don't you, Micky?" she asked, tenderly stroking his hair; "and we'll be just as good friends, won't we?"

"Just as good," said Micky, sadly, "and I'm thankful to you, Phyllis, for—" And then he forgot and raised his eyes.

"Why, you little wretch! You were fooling all the time!" And the netting-door banged on an indignant young giantess who stood two inches taller than he in tennis-shoes.

"Whee!" breathed Micky. "Number four." And he turned to see Georgina coming down the stairs.

"Haven't overtired yourself waiting?" she inquired, anxiously.

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

"No; I kept myself awake thinking of you," Micky answered, softly, "and wondering for the two hundredth time what Georgina would look like if Georgina were in love."

Georgina gave him a shrewd glance. "Hustle along, my wild Irish rose," she said. "I'm only going to play about two games this afternoon, but those I am going to play hard."

"Then let's go out the back way and round by the brook to the tennis-court. It's a little longer, but"—and he looked at her shyly—"I've something to say to you."

"You haven't been discharged again?" Georgina anxiously asked, as they turned into the brook path.

"Just about," admitted Micky.

"Well, that isn't what's worrying you, is it?" asked Georgina. "Something is, for you look a little more Irish than usual to-day."

"My troubles," said Micky, severely, "are real troubles. I've got to get married."

"Good gracious! That's awful!" exclaimed Georgina, thoroughly aroused and sympathetic.

"Isn't it?" agreed Micky. "But Father is determined upon it."

"Oh, just your Father?" questioned Georgina. "You're not interested at all, of course."

"No," said Micky; then, hastily recollecting himself, "not the way Father is. He's daft about it. Offers to double my salary and take me on as a partner—"

"Well, that's awfully decent of him," interrupted Georgina, with an air of making the best of things. "You want me to help, of course. Have you picked out the girl, Micky?"

MICKY PROPOSES

"Well, yes," said Micky, reluctantly. "I was thinking of you—Rose of the Worrlid."

Georgina looked at him for a moment, oblivious of anything and everything else, and her foot caught in a tangle of wild grapevines that stretched across the brook path. She stumbled. Micky tried to catch her, slipped, and they both went down together in a heap.

"Well!" gasped Georgina, as they righted themselves and, still sitting in the path, stared at each other. "That was a nice thing to do!"

"I don't think it was," said Micky, sternly, still somewhat shaken by his fall. "I think the least you could do, Georgina dear, would be to keep your feet when you receive a proposal, even if you do lose your head."

"You Fenian!" thundered the indignant Georgina. "Do you think I lost my head with joy over the prospect?"

"What else?" asked Micky, blithely. "Time levels all men, Georgina. As a child I held you on my knees, and here I am now on my knees before you."

"I don't see it," said Georgina, rising. "You seem to me to be sitting there very much at your ease."

Micky rose. "Take your time," he said, sweetly. "Take your time, little one."

"Oh, Micky!" gasped Georgina, and went off into helpless laughter.

"I am," Micky announced, "a good six years older than you are, so your happy laughter, my child, does not disturb me. Laugh on, and when you're through with the laughing, maybe you'll be naming the day, My Share of the Worrlid."

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

"Micky," Georgina assured him, "the Irish have the prettiest kind of talk in the world, and I'm hard put to it to refuse you; but it wouldn't do, my friend."

"And why not?"

"The man who proposes to me," Georgina said, solemnly, "has got to come at eleven in the morning, when the sun is shining so brightly that he will see all my defects, and without the help of moonlight or softly shaded lamps tell me he loves me for myself alone."

"Moonlight, sunlight, and lamplight are all the same to me, My Own, as far as you are concerned—"

But suddenly Georgina grew very grave. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Mick?" she asked, and leaned over and looked him fairly in the eyes.

For once Micky was without speech.

"I don't like fooling, Micky, even with you—about that," Georgina said, warningly.

"Then you refuse me, too?"

"Too!" echoed Georgina, and shouted with laughter. "Micky! Oh, Micky, how many of us have you asked?"

"Never mind that," said Micky, fiercely, with a rather white face, which Georgina was too mirthful to notice. "I'm waiting for my answer," he added, gravely.

But now Georgina would not take him seriously. "I've half a mind to say yes," she admitted, "just to frighten you."

"It wouldn't frighten me—much, Georgina," Micky said. "Try it."

Georgina turned to him as if to say something,

A black and white illustration by William Van Dyke. The scene depicts a group of people in a field. In the foreground, a man in a hat and suit stands with a cane, looking towards a group of people. A woman in a long dress and hat is seated on the ground, holding a large, round, flat object. Other people are standing or sitting around her, some looking at her. The background shows a field with trees and a fence. The artist's signature 'William Van Dyke' is visible in the bottom left corner.

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MICKY PROPOSES

then changed her mind, flushed scarlet, took to her heels and the safety of the tennis-court.

"Well?" queried Sandy, as Micky came between games and threw himself on the grass beside her.

"I'm a completely rejected man," said Micky, dejectedly. "Now maybe Father 'll be satisfied."

The laugh that bubbled to Sandy's lips died away abruptly as she saw Micky's face. He looked as though he had just tasted something bitter.

"Little ashamed of myself," he admitted, in answer to her questioning glance.

"You ought to be, you know," Sandy said.

Micky nodded. "You're a wise one, Sandy," he said. "Tell me why nobody takes me seriously?"

"Ever taken yourself seriously—yet?" questioned Sandy, shrewdly.

From the tennis-court came Geordie's insistent call: "Oh, you, Mick, you, come and play doubles with Georgina!"

Micky rose. "You're dead right," he said to Sandy, solemnly. "I'll begin—now."

XVI

MONDAY MORNING

"**G**IRLS! Speak now, if you want me to go down-town for The Hag," Geordie announced on Monday morning, as they sat late at the breakfast-table.

All except Nancy, who had gone to town. Phyllis' school had closed for the summer, as well as Georgina's kindergarten, and Libbett had very few pupils in the summer-time.

"Well, rather," Phyllis answered. "There's a dance at the Club to-night, and we've all got our dresses to freshen up a bit, and we don't want to be all tired out with housework besides."

"Phyllis," interrupted Libbett, solemnly, "do you think the ice-cream stain will show very much on my green dress?"

"Not if Sandy 'll let me rip off the coffee-colored lace from her old tan dress and fix it on a ravishing way I know of."

"Of course you can have it, Libbett," called Sandy from the kitchen, where she had just gone to scrape dishes.

"I don't believe I can go," Georgina announced, eying them all solemnly. "I've ripped that old yellow dress of mine from stem to stern, and I can't afford to go to town and try to get any more of the same silk; besides, there isn't time."

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The girls looked at her aghast. A party without Georgina was distinctly no fun at all, and was not Charles Sargent, Will Drayton's New York partner, coming for Georgina to-night in his new motor? "Sir Charles," as Geordie persisted in calling the grave and dignified young lawyer, owing to his exquisite manners, was known in the Sandison family as "the most cautious man alive"; so evidently had he been hunted for his "beautiful eyes"—and his money.

It was difficult for him to believe that a large family of good-looking, penniless girls could exist without wanting to "annex" him, and that they really didn't care anything about a man unless he was amusing in himself and to them. He was gradually learning his lesson. As Georgina was his chief teacher, the rest of the family looked on with unabated joy and considerable amusement.

Phyllis looked at Georgina with parted lips and a smile of genius. She leaned across the table. "I've got an idea," she almost whispered, "but you'll all have to sew like the mischief to carry it out, and solemnly swear not to reveal it to any of the Egyptians."

"I swear," murmured Georgina.

"Well," said Phyllis; and the girls hung on her words; for how could they enjoy themselves while Georgina moped alone? "I want Libbett to go downtown and get four yards of black mosquito-netting."

The girls gasped. Georgina started to protest, but Phyllis went on firmly:

"Libbett must do it, because she's the only one who can, and not look so guilty that people will ask her what she wants it for. I'm going to drape it,

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some of it, over Georgina's silk. Don't yell! Nobody will believe, when I'm through with it, that it's anything but 'imported net.' I tried it in school on a model gown I was building, and the result was ravishing. I let the idea lie in my brain until the time came, and the time has come, and Georgina will look stunning."

Phyllis' face shone with reflected joy. As real as though the triumph was to be her own, for when it came to decorating her sisters Phyllis was as whole-souled and enthusiastic as though every stitch was going on her own back.

"Phyllis," Sandy exclaimed, leaning back and looking at her, "you are in a class by yourself, and I positively cry for you when I am off by myself and anything goes wrong with my clothes. Only, mark you, Georgina, Egypt will ring with it if you give your creation away."

"Poof!" said the airy Georgina. "What do I care as long as it's becoming. Let Egypt gape! As for you, Phyllis, words fail me, but you can wear the ring."

"Oh!" gasped Phyllis; then, hastily, "Won't you want it yourself?"

"No. It's the least I can do, and I'd rather you wore it this time than wear it myself."

Only a Sandison could appreciate what that meant.

Uncle Archie Sandison, whom Father had always alluded to as "Canny Archie," because of his well-known stinginess, had sent it to Georgina on her twentieth, and last, birthday, because Georgina bore his wife's name.

His poor wife had been long dead. Rumor said it was a happy release; but the Sandisons, of course,

MONDAY MORNING

could not know certainly, because Uncle Archie lived in Glasgow and they had never seen him.

Father and Mother had always laughed when they alluded to him or his money, and had carefully instructed their children never to expect any of the money. If anything was loathsome to their father it was what he called "waiting for dead men's shoes." Besides, he had told them Uncle Archie was so old and so "close" that if he could line his coffin with gold and so take his "gear" with him, he would do it.

Judge of their surprise and delight, then, when he sent Georgina this beautiful opal ring, though he had never by word or sign intimated before or since that he cared anything about his dead brother's children.

It was the one "real" treasure in the family, and as such was freely loaned on state occasions.

Indeed, the Sandison girls shared so many of their "things" and wearing apparel that Egypt was often puzzled at the variety of their costumes, and at the same time teased by a certain familiarity about the newest effect.

No wonder, for what one wore this week Tuesday the other was very likely to be wearing next week Wednesday. Age could not be allowed to wither their clothes, nor custom stale the infinite variety of times they wore them.

As Sandy had remarked when stepping into a peculiarly ancient garment that had at various times and seasons supported several of them to as many parties, "Luckily we all wear our 'rue' with a difference."

Sandy was doomed to wear "the Rue," as it had

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

since been called, this time, as she was saving all her money to live on this summer, and must not spend it on clothes.

"It won't exactly dazzle any one," she said, cheerfully, as she tried it on; "but at least it'll be a change for the poor old thing to have me inside of it."

Libbett was despatched for the miracle-working netting, and Geordie for The Hag. The remaining sisters, having cleared the dining-room and piled the dishes neatly in the kitchen ready for The Hag, an ancient and witch-like old Irishwoman with limited capacities for work and an unlimited flow of language, went up-stairs and began the great and sacred duty of refurbishing their finery.

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," Sandy murmured, not irreverently, as she gazed on the ancient rag that was to be hers. "I ought to be good under this discipline." But she sighed as she remembered that Micky had invited the elegant young Lieutenant Jimmy Creighton, U.S.A., just for her. Her thoughts flew longingly to her bank-account; but she resolutely turned them away. That money must be kept sacred if she was to have a whole summer free for her work.

Sandy sponged and pressed, then left the rest for Phyllis' marvelous hands, which soon made the tired trimming turn its least tired side to the world, and inserted a bunch of artificial flowers at such a becoming angle that this time "the Rue" did look different.

"Phyllis," Sandy gratefully remarked, "command me. I will dance at your wedding till my legs snap."

"That won't do me any good," said the busy and

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overworked Phyllis. "It would be much more to the point if you would go down-stairs and heat a couple of irons before I tackle this awful job of Georgina's dress. I'll have finished my own then and can devote myself entirely to Georgina."

"Oh, your gloves, Phyllis!" Georgina suddenly announced. "I forgot to clean them Saturday."

"If they are cleaned now," wailed Phyllis, tragically, "they'll smell to Heaven!"

Tears trembled in her eyes, for it did seem hard that Georgina should have forgotten just her gloves.

"I can fix you up, Phylly," Sandy declared, hopefully, as she appeared on the scene, having put the irons "on." "See if these will do." And she emerged from a dive into her trunk with a new and beautiful pair of gloves. They "did." They were exactly the right shade of blue. Fortunately, Phyllis had very small hands for her size, and Sandy rather large ones for hers, so once more peace and sisterly good-feeling reigned.

The abashed Georgina, however, stood as a model until her feet ached.

When pins were stuck into her she didn't dare protest, only emitting the feeblest of moans, so great was her feeling of guilt. By so narrow a margin had her sister's evening escaped the enduring smell of "cleaning-fluid."

In the midst of their industry Geordie dashed in, hot and breathless.

"For peace' sake, girls," he gasped, "some one of you go down and receive and interview The Hag. I've been on a dead run ever since I sighted her posting up the road behind me. She was still talking when I fled, and I can hear her talking yet."

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It was poor Libbett who was caught.

Libbett, who had dodged up the wood road and come in by the back door, hoping to escape her, had been trapped at the foot of the stairs.

The others kept as still as mice.

Geordie swung himself out of the window, onto the piazza roof, ready to slide down the side-pillar, quite out of sight, and so escape to the barn where his workshop was.

"God bless you, Miss Libbett, for sending for me, and it was just this morning that me and my old man was saying that where we'd get the next meal from only the Lord Himself, and maybe St. Anthony, knew. Then down comes that blessid bye, Mister Geordie, all dressed up he was, and looking as sweet as a new pink."

Here Geordie, with one leg around the side-pillar, turned to wave a fist at the mocking faces of his sisters.

"Come walking in on me, he did, and me with me washing half-way, and yet, hearing that my young leddies wanted me, I jist threw me clothes back into the tub, and says I to me old man, says I, 'I'm up there as fast as me old bones 'll carry me.' God knows, Miss Libbett dear, if me rheumatism was to get any higher up than it is, and reach for the heart of me, and choke the life out of me, what that old man of mine'd do. He's too old and homely like to get a second. God knows, deary, he was bad enough when he was young, and me taking him for the pity I had. He'll never get another wumman, not even an old one, to look over himself and his house.

"Yes, mam, Miss Libbett, he'd jump out of his

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skin to git a chance to come up here and run the lawn-mower for you young leddies. Yes, mam, 'tis meself will tell him he can come up to-morrow.

"Yes, mam, Miss Libbett, I'll tackle them dishes. God knows, deary, I'm stripping off me good clothes in the entry now as fast as I can get out of them, and it's stepping behind this dure I am to get into me working-clothes and me old shoes. No, mam, I'll not be troubling meself to go up-stairs; sure it's just stepping round this dure, and no one the wiser.

"'Tis all done now, as you might say, bit the shoes, and if there's an old pair of Mister Geordie's, and it's he's got the gran' big feet, I could be getting myself intil those.

"Thank you, Miss. In the hall closet? I've me hands on them now. Sure 'tis a misfortune to me that ye all be so small-futted now, isn't it? There's a girrul lives across the way from me, though, I could be using your shoes for. Her husband gits nine dollars a week, and it's fond of the going and dancing she is, and a good little creature and nate, and— Yes, mam, Miss Sandy's shoes would be about the size, and thank ye.

"'Twas a lovely dress for the party, the Shoe Salesmen's Reunion, at the Masonic Hall, she did be making out of Miss Georgina's old white dress, and now wid party slippers she'll— Yes, mam, I'll chop it up fine.

"May the Holy Virgin Herself bless ye—

"Where's the dish-towels? What have ye done wit the soap?

"God knows, deary, I didn't know I was sitting on it, and me just easing off them shoes.

"There, there, deary, get off to your sewing up

LOOKING AFTER SANDY

the stairs, and I'll be doing everything. My, but them's the grand new towels, and did ye say, Miss Libbett, dear, pitaties in the pot wit the inion or widout the inion?

"God save us and bless us, and me likely to forgit that the station-agent seen me chasing up here and give me a telegram for Miss Nancy.

"Here it is in me pocket. 'Tis for Miss Nancy directed, but he said sure anny one of you'd better open it up.

"Where's me aprin? Ah, here 'tis at the back of the dure. Whin's Mrs. MacIntosh coming back, now?"

But Libbett had vanished.

She entered the sewing-room with such a bounce that the girls all looked up in surprise.

"Shut the door behind you tight," Geordie said, taking his leg from about the pillar and crawling back over the piazza roof to the window. "The Hag will be up-stairs in three jerks if you let a squeak out of you."

He climbed solemnly in the window and held out a thin, boyish arm toward Libbett for support. "For you, look," he said, judicially, "ready to crack in two with news."

Phyllis looked up with a frown.

"If you two," she said, seriously, "think a sewing-room's a place to fool in I'd like to have you change your minds right now before you begin."

"Cease slaving," Libbett said, solemnly, "because you won't be able to go to the party."

The girls dropped everything and crowded about her with such frightened faces when they saw the telegram in her hands that Libbett's heart smote her.

MONDAY MORNING

"Oh, don't look that way!" she begged. "There isn't a thing the matter with Nancy or Alan, but you'll have to stay home to-night, just the same, to welcome your rich relation!"

"Uncle Archie?" came in a surprised chorus.

"Nonsense," said Geordie. "He's in Glasgow."

"He has landed," announced Libbett, solemnly, "to discover America and us."

Then she read the telegram aloud:

"Will be with you to-night. Coming on the eight-fifteen. Archibald Sandison."

"Gee!" said Geordie, thoughtfully. "I hope we like him." He stopped abruptly and directed their attention to Sandy. "What's the matter, old girl? You look scared," he said.

"I am," answered Sandy. "Girls, I've always feared this. Suppose I should turn out to be Uncle Archie's long-lost child, and he claims me, and I have to take his ill-gotten gains instead of making my own fortune?"

"Gee!" again said Geordie, as they all gazed upon Sandy and solemnly speculated as to her chances. "Wouldn't it be great? Anyway," he added, gleefully, "this promises to be some summer."

XVII

UNCLE

SANDY'S fear proved utterly ungrounded. Uncle Archie paid no attention to her whatever, and, in fact, openly wondered at his brother's foolishness in "bringing intil a big fam'ly o' his ain anither lassie."

The only point of resemblance was in their hair, for such of Uncle Archie's hairs as were not gray were a faded red. Sandy and he cordially disliked each other from the beginning. Only Sandy tried to conceal it, and Uncle Archie did not.

"I don't understand Uncle Archie," said Sandy to Libbett, as she helped the latter with the upstairs work one morning two or three weeks after their uncle's arrival.

"If you said you didn't like him I could understand that," Libbett commented, her nose in the air. "How he came to be Father's brother, and so different, I don't understand."

"Oh, that's easily understood," Sandy explained. "He says he ran away from home when he was very young, and he has evidently lived all his life with and made all his money from the very roughest class of Scotch people. He's been too mean to associate with any but his inferiors, and has lost what little refinement he may have possessed. What can you expect from such an unmitigated stinger!"

UNCLE

"Every day I look at him," Libbett answered, "I'm sure there's a mistake and he's not a Sandison."

Sandy laughed aloud. "According to the tales Uncle Archie tells us of the Sandisons, when he's accounting for *me*, some of them are rather a poor lot. However," she added, "it isn't of his manners that I'm going for to sing, or his money, either. I don't want any of it at any price if we have to take him with it."

"How long do you think he will stay?" questioned Libbett.

"Why! Who?" inquired Sandy, coming back from the far-away region of her thoughts, where, having dismissed Uncle from their lives, she was busily making a great fortune and dividing it equitably among the Sandisons, making them for ever financially independent.

"Uncle Archie. Who else?" asked Libbett, as she patted the pillows into shape. "Far be it from me to hint that I'm tired of him—but, oh, Sandy—"

"He's a perfect nuisance," stated Sandy, truthfully and calmly; "but as long as he isn't my father"—and here her eyes crinkled up with laughter—"I find him a thoroughly amusing old beggar."

"I'm glad you can find amusement in him," Libbett returned, loftily. "I have all I can do to be decently polite to him. He is so selfish—and so stingy. Just imagine him allowing a boy like Geordie, who has no spending-money to speak of, to pay for his tobacco and all his car-fare."

"Does he do that?" asked Sandy.

Libbett nodded.

"Well, he *is* a real whole-souled stinger, isn't he? I rather admire a perfect type like that."

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"It's all very well for you, Sandy," broke in Georgina, who had reached that point in her weekly routine of furnishing the rooms with clean sheets, pillow-cases, counterpanes, and bureau scarfs. "You are always looking for types and using them, but it looks as if we would have to support him mentally and physically for some time, and he's poisoning this summer."

"You don't think he'll stay all summer!" gasped Sandy, awed at the prospect.

"Oh, what's that?" said Libbett, and they all leaned out the window.

Round the corner they could see, advancing, Georgie and Uncle Archie, plus Georgie's latest invention, and a steamer-chair.

"It's a gran' thing, I've nae doot, laddie," said Uncle Archie, a small, gray-haired Scotchman with a short, stumpy gray beard and a short, dumpy body clad in clothing of unmistakably British cut—and that not the latest or most fashionable.

"Grand! Grand isn't the word for it!" Georgie replied, enthusiastically. "It's magnificent—and practical."

The girls groaned softly in chorus. They had seen the rise and fall of many such.

"Aye, sae ye tell me. I'm waiting tae see."

"It's like this, Uncle," Georgie began.

"Merciful goodness! What is he carrying?" said Phyllis, adding her head to the group. "A wedding-veil?"

"More like a tent," guessed Georgina, scornfully. "Lift your thoughts above yourself, my Phylly. There are other things in the world besides weddings,

UNCLE

wedding garments, and bridegrooms, although you may forget them."

Phyllis gave a conscious look at her hand, where, although The Ring no longer sparkled, another ring far more costly and beautiful had taken its place. For Phyllis at the dance had been fatal to the peace of mind of the grave young doctor, and, though they insisted that Phyllis should not marry until she was at least twenty-one, neither Nancy nor Alan felt that they could refuse their consent; and Dr. Morland was now Phyllis' accepted suitor.

It gave her rather an uplifted feeling to be the first girl engaged, but sometimes she sighed a little as she watched the greater freedom of the wily Georgina, who absolutely refused to be "caught."

Uncle Archie and Georgie had reached the front lawn, and there, under a shady tree, Uncle Archie had arranged his chair and himself in it, while Georgie proceeded to erect and explain his invention.

The girls by craning their necks a little could see and hear all.

The invention consisted of an old umbrella frame, the handle spliced to a large pole, which had a sharpened end which could be firmly stuck into the soft ground. From this skeleton yards of white mosquito-netting had been carefully hung, and now, thrusting the pole into a soft spot in the sod near the back of the chair, Georgie draped the net about the chair and the form of Uncle Archie.

"You see," he said, viewing with pride the bridal whiteness of the canopy as it softened and toned down the red, harsh face of Uncle, who leaned back, smoking a pipe. "Not a single mosquito can pos-

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sibly get near you after you fasten those buttons at the side."

Uncle Archie had suffered grievously from the formidable Jersey mosquito. His red and blotchy face and hands bore witness to the fierceness of the encounter.

"Ah, take care!" Geordie shrieked, as Uncle Archie pulled at a little string that ran along the inside of the handle and stick. "That string is to— There, you have done it!"

He certainly had, for the umbrella had neatly folded itself up, and the net that came in contact with the hot pipe was already smoldering. Geordie hastily extinguished it, and, again erecting the canopy, with needle and thread and a bit of netting began to patch the burned spot.

"There's nae doot it's fell grand, laddie," acknowledged Uncle Archie, leaning back and puffing at his pipe. "I'm mair comfortable and cool like than I was yesterday, when you took me to see that daft-like place they ca' Coney Island. Far mair. Forbye the pleasure is cheaper," he continued. "It didna cost ye much—the net. Did it, laddie?"

"Ten cents a yard," answered Geordie, briefly, snapping off the thread.

"Ah, weel, a guid bit o' money, but ye've given yer auld Uncle a deal o' comfort wi' it, and far more pleasure than he got a' day yesterday, prancing and dancing and shooting doon chutes and sic-like at yon noisy seaside place. They lassies!—I canna stretch a point and ca' them leddies—for no leddy would 'a' been fund in sich a like place, bathing in the ocean wi' a wheen o' men and boys, and mair looking on."

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"Oh, they were all right, Uncle," Geordie said, rather impatiently, fearing the daily boredom of one of his uncle's lectures on the superiority of the manners and customs of Glasga'. "They were perfectly decent working-girls on their Saturday half-holiday, most of 'em. There's no harm in it. It's the custom of the country. Anyway, I'll not take you there again."

"Too expensive," he added to himself, as he looked wonderingly at the selfish old red-faced individual and tried to find something in him to like.

Then the pride of the inventor overcame him as he finished the patch. "There you are! Great, isn't it?"

"Fine!" echoed Uncle Archie, thoroughly enjoying his immunity from the keen mosquito. "I wouldna ask better if ye'll jist hand in *The Scotsman* to me. I'm no yin to countenance ony of yer American papers. They're awfu'! Fair scandalous! Did ye get me a wee bit o' tobacco when ye were doon the toon last?"

"Yes," said Geordie, passing it through, and wishing, as he saw Uncle Archie grasp it and settle back, that he could forget the packet represented the last of his pocket-money.

Geordie strolled off to tell the girls that by his cleverness the tennis-court was free and clear of their elderly encumbrance, who had lately taken to criticizing the game—which he knew nothing about—much to the annoyance of the players. They did not wish to be rude to an elderly man, even though he was selfishly spoiling their pleasure and that of their friends.

Geordie further and sadly stated that in his opin-

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ion they would never get rid of him. "I'd rather he'd never leave us a cent of his old money than have him continually around," he mourned.

"Don't worry!" Sandy said, scornfully. "He isn't going to leave us any money. He loves it so that either he'll live for ever for its sake or, if he has to die, he'll leave it to some library to make 'a bit showing and pit up his name.'"

"Well, we don't want his money," Libbett announced, decidedly; "but, oh, how we want to be alone once more! I wish Mrs. Mac would come back, for she'd soon rout him."

But the weeks went by, and Mrs. Mac was still needed in "Pawtuckie," and Uncle Archie showed no signs of going. Indeed, it was only too evident that wild horses would not drag him from his comfortable and economical abiding-place until he himself saw fit to move. He had quite evidently decided that here he could live, as an honored guest, on the mere promise of leaving his money to the family.

He little knew his kin; and would not have believed their entire disregard of the might of his "siller." He mistook their courtesy to a guest for a crafty desire to "win him ower." He was quite determined to take all he could get from them, holding tight to all he had.

Relatives are relatives, and hospitality is hospitality. There seemed nothing to do but endure his presence with what patience they could; but as time went on Geordie's statement: "Candor compels me to remark that My Uncle is an unmitigated old bore," was indorsed by every member of the family.

For a long while Nancy held out, seeking excuses

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for him, but finally, when he took to using the hack continuously from the station, and just as continuously charging it to their account and then lecturing them daily on their extravagance, Nancy's patience broke down. He had just been holding forth on the extravagance of having "a sweet," as he called all dessert, on the table twice a day. Nancy explained to him, briefly and tersely, just what their income was and what they did with it; advised him that they had supported themselves for years without his help and could continue to do so. She did not think he had any right to criticize their mode of living.

While this astonishing show of independence from a mere woman floored Uncle Archie for a time, it was only for a time. Next day he was making himself as obnoxious as usual, sitting under his mosquito-canopy and discoursing on America in his most irritating vein to any one who came within earshot. Poor Dr. Morland was the victim, generally. His professional and natural politeness was strained to the utmost, especially when Uncle Archie insisted on proving to him that Georgina, his prime favorite for the time being, was "the cream o' the family," when, quite naturally, the young man thought his Phyllis was the "cream" of that or any other family.

The family liked Dr. Morland very much; so much that Phyllis openly complained that he seemed to think he had become engaged to the whole family, so willing and ready was he to include them in any amusement plan, and so delighted to be accepted as a brother that chocolates fell upon them daily like manna from Heaven.

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While he, too, resented Uncle Archie's presence, he could think of no polite way in which Uncle could be removed. His idea of a hint, like Geordie's, seemed to the girls like a direct blow; and they were compelled to refuse the Doctor's plans one by one.

Phyllis suggested "soaping the stairs," as a last resort; but, as Nancy pointed out, that seemed a bit cruel, and they would probably have to take care of him for life should he be badly injured.

Geordie's proposal to chain him in a chair opposite The Hag while she talked him to death was likewise put aside; although The Hag, a fierce champion of her young ladies, hated and despised Uncle Archie, and would gladly have fallen on him with a broom or other handy household implement. With difficulty could she be made to wait upon him. It remained for Sandy to solve the problem and rescue the family from their old man of the sea, who was rapidly making their summer both unhappy and expensive.

Sandy, having first sworn the entire family to co-operation, fidelity, and secrecy, openly declared, in the presence of "Sir Charles" and the highly susceptible Lieutenant Creighton, that none of them would go to the Midsummer Eve Dance unless some man among them would render Uncle Archie's stay impossible.

If there was no such man, no such daring and intrepid soul, they would not go. The entire Sandison family would stay at home with their Uncle and learn to admire him. For a man who could resolutely and cheerfully stay on when his welcome was not only worn out but threadbare was a strong soul indeed, and they would all prefer to spend an

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instructive evening with such a tower of strength rather than dance, or (here Georgina took in "Sir Charles" with the corner of her brilliant eyes) sit out under the stars with merely polite nonentities.

"My grief," said Micky, sitting up, "that's going it strong!"

"Rather," echoed Lieutenant Creighton, with a reproachful glance at Sandy. What was the girl thinking of, and his leave growing short?

"No stronger than we feel," answered Sandy, avoiding his eyes.

The three men looked at each other.

A look of cunning stole over Lieutenant Creighton's boyish face, but he said nothing. A look of equal craft illuminated the fine lines of "Sir Charles" Sargent's handsome and somewhat impassive countenance; but likewise he held his peace.

Micky, however, rolled over on the grass howling with glee, and when he was rolled back and straightened out and asked to explain, could only gasp that he had an idea.

"I don't care," he announced, serenely, "whether Sandy goes to the dance or not; but I promised to take Georgina, and I'm not going to have her disappointed." But he would not tell his idea—yet.

Georgina sat and looked at him in glee, but without a word. She knew from the crestfallen look upon "Sir Charles'" face that he had been slowly and solemnly deciding to ask her himself. Georgina wasn't sorry for him in the least. "Teach him to make up that ponderous mind faster next time," she said to herself, and turned to smile on Micky. Georgina had made a point of being very kind to Micky—ever since she refused him.

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The next day Lieutenant Creighton came up and invited Uncle Archie to go with him to Long Island and go up in a new dirigible, which the Lieutenant was going to "try out" for an inventor friend of his.

The girls looked on in horrified amusement when Uncle Archie, deeply flattered, consented to accompany him.

Sandy watched the pair go away together in a silent ecstasy of joy almost painful to behold.

"At any rate, Georgina," she said, "he's not a snob, that little lieutenant."

For no greater contrast could be imagined than the trim, well-set-up, well-groomed young American and the clumsy, badly dressed old Scotchman.

"It's genuine eighteen-carat devotion," said Georgina, with a wary eye on Sandy. But Sandy refused to be impressed, and remarked audibly that the Lieutenant was getting "troublesome."

Nancy sighed. Just when she was sure that some entirely worthy young man was about to make Sandy forget for ever what Nancy termed the "Joe-episode," Sandy sent the man away as "troublesome."

When evening brought Uncle Archie and his escort back, however, it was Uncle Archie who was cheerful and gay, while the Lieutenant was a glum man indeed.

Flying had no terrors for Uncle. He was simply delighted at getting the sensation so "cheap-like"; that is, "no charge for the ride in the machine."

It had without doubt been an extremely trying day for Lieutenant Creighton; but Georgina, indignant at Sandy's indifference, sympathized with him, and Georgina was very good at sympathy.

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He plucked up courage and began evolving another scheme before the fatal day should come round.

What was the amazement of the girls, and Georgina's special astonishment, when "Sir Charles" and his motor appeared with an invitation for Uncle Archie to come and spend the day.

Georgina, who had thought, most naturally, that the invitation would be for her, felt a bit crestfallen for a moment; but as she noticed how carefully he excluded all others from the party her glee became manifest. Evidently this was to be Uncle Archie's Waterloo.

Evening, however, brought home a pale and exhausted Uncle Archie, who was still in the ring, and spoke admiringly, in awestruck tones, of "thon quiet-looking lawyer budy's management of thon powerfu' machine," as "something wonderfu'," adding that he had "enjoyed himsel' maist mighty."

From the weary and uncommunicative "Sir Charles" the girls could glean nothing, though rumors of a terrific speed on one of the worst roads in the country reached them through Geordie.

Micky, with his tongue in his cheek, sauntered up early one morning and asked Uncle Archie if he wouldn't like to come to town and take in some of the sights with him.

Uncle Archie was a bit languid about it, having climbed to the top of nearly all the high buildings already and taken in every "free-for-nothing" show with his "iron legs," as Geordie disrespectfully called those faithful and tireless appendages. Frequently had poor Geordie arrived home exhausted, ready to sink on the couch to rest his weary and growing limbs, only to have Uncle Archie suggest

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"a bit jaunt doon to the toon afore we turn in." Sometimes, jaded as he was, Geordie would take the "jaunt" rather than have his sisters bored the long evening through by the relation of Uncle Archie's "experiences."

Now Micky patiently and kindly pointed out to Uncle Archie that although it was summer-time there were many things to see in the great city, and he would make it his duty to show him the sights from Chinatown to the Claremont. They set off together.

It was a pleasant, cheery, happy Micky that returned, but a sodden, dispirited, anxious-looking Uncle Archie, with very little to say of the sights of New York, and no long-winded "experiences" to relate.

Next morning Micky arrived, smiling, accompanied by Lieutenant Creighton, and once more Uncle Archie, a trifle reluctant, was led forth to see the town and surrounding villages, as Lieutenant Creighton gaily announced.

At sunset Uncle Archie returned, still with his escort of pleased and pleasing young men. But, oh, what a change in Uncle! Sad and solemn, scarcely eating a mouthful, he sat and glowered at the two. When they arose to go, and spoke of what a pleasant time they had had, and how they would be up tomorrow to take him to still further pleasing and instructive "sights," Uncle Archie's fear knew no bounds.

He would need "resting" the next day, he declared.

They would call the day after for him.

They had had such a good time, they cheerfully

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announced, and had seen so much that they had quite forgotten about, that they meant to make regular pilgrimages with him while he was here, and go further afield each day.

Then Uncle Archie, frightened and blocked, spoke the fatal words: "I'll no be here long. I'm going awa' tae—" He saw by the expectant faces about him how he had committed himself, and went on hurriedly: "I'll be awa' till Chicago, to veesit Alan."

Micky and the Lieutenant arose cheerfully; but there was no joy on the face of Sandy or the other Sandisons, and as Sandy and Geordie followed the two conspirators to the piazza she spoke hurriedly and scornfully.

"A nice mess you've made of it, Micky. Saddled Alan with him."

"Well," said Micky, quietly, "Alan's a man, anyway, and it needs a man to tackle that old—gentleman."

"Oh, say, what did you do?" asked Geordie, unable to keep his curiosity in leash any longer.

"That's what I want to know, too," said Sandy, softening. "It was because you had cornered him that he said Chicago. What made him loosen his clutch on us?"

"Well," Micky began, guiltily, "it's a pretty low-down trick, but I knew no other that would do our business. I forgot my money the first day, and he had to pay—everything—for both of us."

Geordie collapsed with delight.

"Of course I said I'd pay him," Micky went on; "but the second day both the Lieutenant and I, unfortunately, lost our money—and—well, we can be

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quite expensive when we try. It finished the old man, you see."

Geordie fell upon his neck and embraced him.

"Bless you, Micky, bless you. Any time you want anything from me just name it. Just name it; that's all. You're a prince!"

Giving Micky's hand a last hearty wring, Geordie went in to gloat over the man who had used up all his summer allowance and earnings for car-fare, hacks, and admissions. Now he knew how it felt!

"You can give Creighton the credit, if you like, Sandy," Micky said, modestly, regarding that young woman warily from the corner of a particularly knowing eye, "for he helped finish Uncle up. I know you won't care to come with me—much. Besides, I have already asked Georgina. Still, you can always come along, too, if you like, Sandy."

Sandy's laughter woke the echoes.

XVIII

SANDY'S NEAR-ELOPEMENT

ALL the Sandisons went to the dance; but Sandy went with Geordie, much to that young man's satisfaction. As he explained it, "Sandy was no trouble at all to a fellow. Just had to tote her there and back, and betweenwhiles do what you liked with yourself."

Really he was intensely proud at being selected, for he liked going places with Sandy; and he knew well that the privilege would never have been his if it hadn't been for what was afterward known as "Sandy's near-elopement," which took place the day Uncle Archie went away and two days before the Midsummer Eve Dance.

For Uncle Archie decided to sail without going to Chicago for a short stay. Alan, warned by his sisters' experience, had not extended him an indefinite invitation. It was too expensive a trip for "jist a wee whiley," Uncle decided.

He spent hours of his last day giving advice and suggestions to the girls. The whole sum of which seemed to be that they must watch themselves for extravagant habits, not depend on him to leave any money to them, and be careful—with a glare at Micky and the Lieutenant—"to choose wise-like husbands."

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The girls spent no time in vain regrets. They were sorry that Uncle Archie hadn't been all their fancy painted him, but, as Georgina remarked: "He was a character, and had at least provided them with expensive amusement, if he had not evoked love."

As for Geordie, hours of patient listening to long harangues about the extravagance and other bad habits of "they Americans," without being able to retaliate; and advice as to how he was to lay "penny against penny and pound against pound" had almost made a nervous wreck of him. Yet he declared sadly and solemnly that he would miss him. Uncle had been a great stimulus to the inventive faculty.

Still buying tobacco and paying car-fare, Geordie tenderly escorted Uncle to the steamer, Anchor Line, and second cabin of course, and received a well-worn copy of *Scottish Chiefs*, and his almost tearful good-bys, as the ship bore Uncle home to his beloved and perfect "Glasga'." All the Sandisons fervently hoped he would enjoy a long life there and never, never wander from his ain dear fireside; also that he would leave all his money to build a library.

Believing firmly that the parting gift to Geordie foreshadowed this disposal of Uncle Archie's "siller," the worn volume was rebound ornately by Phyllis, kept on a shelf all by itself, and always alluded to reverently as "the Sandison Foundation."

On the day of Uncle's departure Georgina and Sandy were indulging in a wild and triumphant "Dance of the Released from the Fear o' Siller," improvised on the moment to original music by Libbett, when Lieutenant Creighton appeared driv-

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ing Mr. Conry's newest motor. It was patent to all except Sandy that he had come just for Sandy.

However, he politely but without undue warmth offered to accommodate Georgina also, after having heard Georgina make it plain that she could not accept. Sandy, her pet theory—that he was really devoted to Georgina and only cultivated her own society because he thought it politic—demolished before her eyes, still clung blindly to the thought that she might be doing him an injustice and that, after all, he might not prove “troublesome.” Upheld by this thought and the desire to enjoy to the full this glorious day, the fact that he did not ask any of the others failed to impress Sandy, and she gaily took her seat beside the young officer, and, disregarding the mocking light in Georgina's eyes, flung the girls a radiant good-by.

It was a beautiful morning, the house was at last clear of Uncle, and Sandy felt very much alive; likewise the Lieutenant was both good-looking and amusing.

She did not return home for luncheon, but nobody thought much of that; Sandy had probably stopped at Conry's and would come up later with Micky. Molly Conry, who was Molly Conry still, was very fond of Sandy.

Micky came up by himself after luncheon, and, on hearing that Sandy had gone with the Lieutenant and had not yet returned, raised his eyebrows, and after a few moments announced that he must return to town and post some important letters which he had forgotten. He volunteered to do any errands, and invited Georgina and Libbett to accompany him.

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Libbett refused because it was too hot, and equally because it was Leonard's half-holiday; while Georgina refused because she wanted to discipline Micky. Micky went thoughtfully whistling down the road alone, with the promise that he would be back shortly.

On his arrival down-town, however, the artful Micky did not go toward the post-office, but along the cool, shady road to the Drayton place, the largest in town, and strolled up the side path to the vine-covered pergola.

He found "Sir Charles" Sargent there, stretched comfortably in a big chair, reading and smoking. He was spending the summer with Will and seldom went to town on Saturdays.

"Will home?" asked Micky, after greeting him disrespectfully and joyously.

"No," said "Sir Charles," quietly. "Didn't you know he'd been up at the capitol all week on the prison-reform commission? He's probably followed the governor down to his summer place to-day. Will keeps at that business, no matter what the thermometer registers. Thinks they'll put their bill through this time."

"Good work," said Micky, approvingly. "I always suspect from Will's earnestness that he fears to find Joe in some of the prisons."

Sargent looked at him disapprovingly. He didn't like flippant remarks about serious subjects. Micky noted the disapproval, and then asked the other man, cheerfully: "Did Will go up in the car?"

"Oh no," Sargent answered. "They are both in the garage. Why?"

"Thought of borrowing one," announced Micky.

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"I don't think Will would mind, considering my object," he added, with a smile at the placid gentleman in front of him.

"I don't think he would mind, anyway," Mr. Sargent said, but a little doubtfully. Like many others, he didn't do Micky justice. Few men could handle a boat, car, gun, or horse better than indolent-looking Micky Conry.

"Well," replied Micky, "if you don't mind giving the order, I will be taking the roadster. I'm in a bit of a hurry."

"Sir Charles" gave the order without asking more questions; but when that business had been attended to he looked at Micky with just the least bit of curiosity.

"Want company?" he said. "I've nothing to do this afternoon."

Micky looked at him a moment doubtfully, then grinned. "If you like to come. It's a delicate matter, and always remember I didn't ask you to."

"Why?" asked Sargent, his curiosity, of which he had a feminine quantity, despite his calculating calmness and his efforts to disguise it, thoroughly aroused.

"I'm thinking Jimmy Creighton's lost his head," answered Micky, with perfect calm, "and this is a rescuing party for—one of the girls."

Now jealousy had caused "Sir Charles" to share Sandy's delusion—that the Lieutenant was fascinated by the fascinating Georgina. In spite of himself "Sir Charles" sat bolt upright in his chair. "You mean to say that—"

"I will explain as we go along," announced Micky, as the car appeared in sight.

"We won't need you, Carl, I'll drive," he said to

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Drayton's man. "Sir Charles" climbed in, and with Micky at the wheel the car bounded along at a good speed. Micky turned it toward the river, and then turned to his companion.

"Well?" said Sargent, sharply.

"I may be mistaken; that is why I wasn't urgent about your coming along, but I have an idea that Jimmy Creighton's about to make a fool of himself. I'll save him if I can; and if I can't I'll do my best—for Georgina's sake," he added, softly.

"Oh, confound you! Get it out!" snapped the usually self-controlled Mr. Sargent.

Micky's countenance continued to wear the calm and peaceful expression that made knowing ones avoid him as "up to mischief." If he was surprised at the tone of "Sir Charles'" last remark he did not show it.

"You see," he finally volunteered, having convinced himself that the machine and the road were all right, "Jimmy Creighton's leave is nearly up, and he can't find out just where he stands. He's getting desperate. I happened to hear him asking Father one or two questions about the marriage law in this state—whether one person could take out a license, and things like that—and he went to town with Dad yesterday and visited the City Hall and the license bureau. Likewise I saw him down in the garage this morning tampering with Dad's new car in a way that suggested to me my young friend might mean to have a—well—slightly-necessary-on-purpose breakdown. Jimmy's awfully romantic. So when I found they'd left early this morning, and hadn't returned yet, I thought I'd better go in search of them."

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"Are you in love with Georgina?" asked a voice that was far from calm.

"I have always loved Georgina," said Micky, in a voice that was truly calm. "But then I love all the Sandison girls."

"Are you going to marry her?" asked the same tense voice.

"Georgina has refused me," answered the calm one.

"Let me take the wheel," said the tense voice, trying to steady itself. "I know more about this car than you do, and I'll rip a little speed out of her."

Micky, having learned what he wanted, had pity. He stopped the car at the little road-house they were passing, got out, and interrogated a small boy who was lounging on the steps. He watched out of the corner of his eyes "Sir Charles" taking the driver's place; then Micky climbed in silently, lit a cigarette with ease and grace, and, as the other man bent to his work, subjected his face to a pleased and interested scrutiny.

"The turn to the right," said Micky, "and as fast as you like. I think we're on the right track now; and, by the way, Sargent, I think you're under a misapprehension. I'm doing this for Georgina's sake, but it's Sandy who's with Jimmy."

Sargent turned, gave him one annihilating glance, and then bent to his work.

"I'm glad you took the machine, though," Micky observed, peacefully, as he lit another cigarette. "You're calmer and more tranquil than I am. You've got the cool, placid legal mind, while I'm a bit fussed. Long time ago I promised another fellow to keep an eye on—to look after Sandy."

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Sargent failed to respond, and for the next half-hour nothing further was said, and very little seen, as the car rushed along; then Micky leaned over and said to his companion: "Slow down at the bend. I think I see—the car."

As they reached the bend the still angry "Sir Charles" stopped his car with a jerk. There, in the most picturesque spot of a famously picturesque road, on the right-hand bank, under a delightfully shady tree, sat an indignant red-headed maiden.

Sandy was pale, from hunger as she afterward explained, but otherwise her independent self.

Across the road, heated, dusty, and angry, his toolkit out and his car at a standstill, stood Jimmy Creighton.

"It's quite all right now, Sandy," he was pleading. "Come, don't be foolish."

"I have no intention of getting into that car again," answered Sandy, with perfect frankness. "When it becomes cooler, and you calm down enough to behave naturally, I'll take the trolley home. I'm very tired of this, Mr. Creighton," she said, distinctly, "and there are some people coming along, so please don't make an exhibition of yourself just at this minute."

Sargent was bowing gravely, and Micky beamed upon them.

"Trouble, Jimmy?" he called, as he got down and came toward them.

"Nothing but a little breakdown," said Lieutenant Creighton, trying to make his voice sound just as usual. "I've fixed the thing all right now, but for— for some reason Miss Sandy doesn't trust—"

"That car," interrupted Sandy, rising hastily, her

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hand on Micky's shoulder. "It's frightened me stiff, Micky," she said, and the hand on his shoulder trembled a little. Micky felt it, and took it in his own and patted it fraternally, inwardly noting that Sandy looked more like a woman and less like a careless boy when she was tired—and a little frightened. "I really can't, Micky, trust myself with that car," Sandy continued.

"In that case, Sargent," said Micky, without a smile, "you will just have to turn round and take the lady home. I'll come with Jim. You must have been reckless, Jimmy," he added, shaking his head.

"Nothing of the sort," muttered Creighton, angrily, after one imploring glance at Sandy, and then proceeded to busy himself with the machine, allowing Micky to help the girl into the apparently impassive Sargent's car.

Sargent, who was still too angry with Micky to trust himself to speak, busied himself looking after Sandy's comfort, without a word or glance toward the discomfited Creighton.

Micky, who with Pope believed the proper study of mankind is man, continued to regard both men with pleasure and interest.

"It was only a near-spill, but it has made an abject coward of me," Sandy explained, somewhat nervously, as she settled herself beside "Sir Charles." "It will be a long time before I consent to go out in that car again, Micky."

"That's a calamity," answered Micky, gravely; "but I'll try to bear up, since there are others in your family and out of it who have their nerve still with them in larger quantities than you have, Sandy.

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Now, you'd best hustle along with Sargent before the girls get anxious. They wondered why you weren't back for luncheon. Have you had anything to eat?" he asked, casually.

"No," burst from Lieutenant Creighton, angrily. "We've been here since before noon."

"My word!" said Micky, stopping further revelations from the stricken Lieutenant and pretending not to see the gleam in Sandy's eyes. "You must have been slow at the mending, Jimmy."

"It wasn't the mending," began the unfortunate young man.

"It was because I wouldn't trust—that car," Sandy interposed, quickly.

"Well, I'll get in with you, Jimmy, and we'll coax her along," Micky advised. "The Dranksmere Inn's a little bit farther along the road, and we can all get a bite there."

"I'd rather not, Micky," Sandy said, hastily. "I'd rather wait till I get home, please." And there was so much meaning in her eyes, and so much misery in Creighton's at the prospect of a "four-some," that Micky didn't urge it. Dismissing Sargent with his blessing, he turned to aid the unhappy Jimmy gather the scattered tools together.

"My grief!" he murmured. "What have you been doing with these, Jim? Dancing among them?"

"I got a little hot—and kicked the lot," admitted Jimmy, sullenly.

"You are still young," said Micky, looking kindly at the boy. "Now, what's the matter with—the machine?"

"Nothing the matter with the car," answered the poor boy, his face flushing. "It was—the girl."

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"My word!" said Micky again.

"Nothing a man ever learns or reads about women helps him with a woman," continued the angry Creighton. "They are the most unreasonable, unromantic, unsentimental, worldly, calculating, conventional—things—God ever put breath in."

"My grief!" said Micky, once more, softly.

Then, with a subdued smile, he stooped, picked up a paper which had fallen beside the monkey-wrench, and smoothed it out. "A marriage license," he murmured, with a quick glance at the names, then handed it gravely to Creighton, who tore it into shreds.

"I got it yesterday," he muttered, "as—as an experiment. I dropped it when I started to monkey with the tools to-day. She saw it, and—and wouldn't get back into the car again."

"I should have advised," said Micky, with his eyes fixed on the horizon line, "if I had been consulted, not to try the high-handed male line of conduct with Sandy. She's not the type."

"She's always said she loved romance," growled the miserable Jimmy, cramming the last tool into the box and locking it; "but she's hard as iron. Not a spark of real romance in her. Not a spark."

"It might have been love she lacked," said the wise Micky. "That's one thing to be very sure of before you start a romance, Jimmy, my boy. You may have taken too much for granted. Sandy never does. She was hit—hard once," he added, reflectively, "and she doesn't seem to forget it."

"Shall we take the same road back," he asked, as he took the wheel, "and chance meeting them again?"

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"I never want to see her again," said Lieutenant James Creighton; and Micky turned his car toward the left-hand road.

On the right-hand road "Sir Charles" was making excellent time and very little conversation; and Sandy was feeling oddly enough that he ought not to have come to her rescue; it ought to have been Tommy or Joe.

At Dranksmere Inn he halted his car, got out, gave an order, and, coming back, held out his hand to help Sandy alight.

"But—" began that damsel.

"You are to get out and have a cup of tea," he commanded, eying her severely, "and then you will be able to tell a more connected story to your sisters," he added, severely, "especially Miss Georgina. She will be shocked."

A vision of the impish glee with which Georgina would hail her recital flitted before Sandy's brain. She looked him indignantly in the eye. "A more connected story!" she repeated, angrily. "I always tell the girls everything." And then, as she looked into his judicially pained face, she reached out her hand and meekly allowed him to help her out. "Almost everything," she amended.

XIX

GEORGINA UNSETTLES THINGS

UNCLE'S going, and the fact that neither he nor his riches would ever trouble them again, caused deep peace to settle over the Sandison household, a peace greatly increased by the completion of Sandy's novel.

It was approved by the family and sent forth into the world of publishers to seek its fortune, accompanied by the good wishes of all, except Mrs. Mac, but newly returned to her "faimly."

Mrs. Mac was not going to give forth any encouraging sentiments to "thon conceited reid-heid, who thinks sae muckle o' hersel'. Far, far better if she'd tak tent till hersel' and settle doon wi' some wise-like working lad who wad keep her in her place."

In Mrs. Mac's opinion it was not "chancey" the way "her girls" were going on. Phyllis alone had her full approval. Phyllis was going to be married.

In vain did Sandy argue the matter with Mrs. Mac, pointing out that if she succeeded life would be easier for them all. "Fine" did Mrs. Mac "ken that there was no faith to be placed in the likes o' thon." "Thon" meaning books. "Jist a waste o' time," she said. "If a buddy maun read, there wiz aye the newspaper, and wi' that and the proper amount of hoosehold wark there was nae time for fashing wi' the likes o' thon silly trash."

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Sandy had finally to hold her peace, knowing that only the sight of actual "siller" would convince the dear old directress of their home that what she wrote was worth while, and understanding, likewise, that no matter what she did she would always be an interloper to Mrs. Mac.

In the mean time, having been transferred to the New York office of the magazine, Sandy was working there as hard and as tranquilly as was possible for a brand-new author.

Suddenly the deep peace of the household was broken rudely, and by Georgina. She had sent the most important of her swains on their several ways, but "Sir Charles" still hung on in his cautious manner.

"They will dodge round each other," Libbett had slyly and gleefully confided to Sandy, "each trying to be sure before they venture into anything definite until they are forty-odd; then they'll get married quick to make up for lost time."

Georgina had gone to visit Alan in Chicago and to see his Mary, and had prolonged her stay indefinitely. Finally Nancy had had to write her, a little peremptorily, to say that if she did not intend to come home, let them know in time to rent the kindergarten to some more devoted teacher before the first of October.

The next train brought Georgina home with a scarab of priceless worth on her bosom, with an ancient Egyptian ring on her finger, and the news that she was engaged to Hollister Raleigh Erskine, an eminent Egyptologist, with a string of titles and degrees that reached quite across the page, and more money, as Geordie elegantly put it, "than you could shake a stick at."

GEORGINA UNSETTLES THINGS

He was the son of the millionaire founder of the house of business Alan was associated with, and Alan, Georgina announced smilingly, was "quite pleased."

"Yes, but how did you do it?" Geordie asked, open-mouthed. "It isn't the money, for of course you are good enough for anybody; but you and a scientist! Good Lord! You don't know anything about any other Egypt but this!"

"It isn't necessary," Georgina assured him, still smiling. "But if you really want to know, Geordie, he has already taught me one or two endearing hieroglyphics that look very well at the end of his letters." And Georgina went off into shouts of laughter as she looked at the disgusted face of her younger brother.

Apparently unable to live without her, Professor Erskine had followed her home, and in order to be near his divinity had been actually boarding at Miss Martha Merriman's. This was a true test of devotion.

Egypt boasted no real hotel, only Old Egypt House, a mere country "saloon"; and—well, a boarding-house is a boarding-house. Miss Merriman's was not an exception. Mitigated as his sufferings were by the fact that the compassionate Mrs. Mac would hardly let him dine anywhere else, still, as Geordie remarked admiringly, "Prof. Erskine certainly was nervy."

He was; but he needed it all, for he had come on with the fixed intention of snatching the wily and undecided Georgina at once from her kindergarten and her family.

His next Egyptian expedition started within three weeks, and he had every intention of going, and not

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for a moment did he contemplate going without Georgina. They would be gone for at least three years, and—Georgina being Georgina—how could he wait that long?

Georgina didn't see how he could, either, and yet how could she marry him in two weeks? It wouldn't give her time for—anything.

"If 'anything' means clothes," said Professor Erskine, earnestly, "you know, Georgina, there will be plenty of time to get 'anything' in London or Paris."

Georgina looked at him in silent displeasure. "You may not like my clothes," she began, sternly.

"I love them," interrupted Erskine, hotly and truthfully.

"But," continued Georgina, loftily, "such as they are, they are mine. I made the money that bought them, and I helped make them, and the clothes that go in my trunk when—I—if—I—"

"You will," said Hollister, with conviction, "and I was just afraid you meant you were not going to get any more like 'em."

Georgina giggled. "I am, but oh! I think that last sentence is frightfully involved for a learned—"

"Oh, rot!" growled Hollister. "Georgina, for a few clothes—will you—"

"I love clothes, I warn you," interrupted Georgina.

"I will love them, too, when I have you to hang them on. By Jove! Georgina, I always used to kick about the shopping mother and the girls insisted on when I met them in Paris. Hauling a fellow round while they tried on frocks; but if they were trying them on you, Georgy! That would be something worth while!"

GEORGINA UNSETTLES THINGS

"Hollister," said Georgina, firmly, "your sisters are beautiful."

"Georgina," responded Hollister, as firmly, and meant it, "they are well enough, but they can't hold a candle to you."

Then there was an interval.

Afterward Hollister held forth on the weakness of blocking his career by insisting on a fussy wedding that would delay his departure; or the cruelty of sending him away without her, which would, of course, utterly unfit him for work and so spoil his career for ever.

It required much argument and several intervals before Georgina was utterly convinced.

Geordie, discouraged with his latest invention, and longing for companionship, and, as he put it, "a little rich wit" to enliven the day, sauntered down the brook path and interrupted an interval.

He turned to flee, thought better of it, and coughed loudly.

"That you, Geordie?" Hollister said, pleasantly. "What's wrong with your throat, my son?"

Geordie noted, with instant fraternal displeasure, that his arm was still about Georgina.

"Congratulate me, Geordie. Georgina's promised to marry me two weeks from Thursday."

"Tell that to the marines," his future brother-in-law said, wearily. "Much you know about girls and the fusses they get up about their clothes."

"But I have, Geordie," said Georgina, a little wistfully for her, wondering if Geordie would miss her much when she was quite gone. "Holly's got to sail that very night on that horrid old ship."

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"Holly!" groaned Geordie. "Listen to that! Once you were Professor Erskine."

"Thank the Lord," said that person, devoutly, "I am no longer so to Georgina—or to you."

"If you've gone and strung him about loving to help him dig," continued the frank and unconverted Geordie, who was really sad at the thought of losing his beloved sister, "I'll just make it my business to tell him now a few truths about the way you squeal about digging bait for me and how you hate the sun."

"Don't bother, Geordie," Georgina laughed. "I've told him all the disagreeable things I know about myself, and it doesn't seem to frighten him."

"Nothing frightens me as long as I have you," said the brave Egyptologist.

"The man's infatuated," Geordie sighed—"fairly infatuated. You—why, you roar over every one of Georgina's jokes."

"Well, you like them yourself," Hollister defended himself. "You all do."

"Yes; but we just laugh," objected Geordie. "We don't roar and then beam at everybody the way you do. You're a good fellow, too," he said, regretfully, "and awfully athletic when you get away from Georgina. But if she's anywhere around you're no good, not even at tennis. You keep looking at her." He sighed again.

"Oh, well, I guess it's love," he decided, hopelessly, gazing sadly at them. "I tell you what, Hollister, I've had a good deal of it this year."

"Yours is a sad case, without doubt, my son," Hollister said, blandly. "Never mind; when your sisters are all married off you will have more room for your inventions."

GEORGINA UNSETTLES THINGS

"All married!" shouted Geordie, looking at him perfectly exhausted. "Say, I pretty near hate you. I hope to peace somebody 'll stick by me for a little while and not leave me all alone with Mrs. Mac." He turned on his heel so disconsolately that Georgina's tender heart smote her. She started after him, but Hollister held her back firmly.

"He can wait, Georgina. You can pity him and pet him all you like after I go; but let him stir up the others—just now. You haven't told me yet whether you'd rather stop in London or—" And it began again.

Geordie raced madly up to the house. He was very unhappy. "Things," he explained to Mrs. Mac, "were getting too thick at home."

Mrs. Mac sympathized with him for a while, and then, becoming impatient, sent him about his business.

"Awa you and get some place to be quiet in, Laddie," she advised. "I havena time to be gab-gabbing wi' my bread no made and a hale jing-bang coming to dinner; and dinna groan so ower the lovers," continued the wise woman. "In two—three years ye'll be acting the same way yersel'. I havena the sma'est doot."

This statement so annoyed Geordie that he spent another half-hour in trying to convince her just why the future never could have any such sickening period in store for him. Mrs. Mac finally gave him a fork and ordered him to prick her biscuits with it.

"When I like a girl," he continued, "I like her well enough, but nothing happens like what's happening here. I wouldn't," he said, with a savage dig, "after earning an international reputation ex-

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ploring real truly Egypt and all the rest of the world, sit round in a country town like this day after day just for the sake of being near a girl I was engaged to. No, sir! No girl could keep me tied down like that. Not but what Georgina's a good sort—"

Here the distracted Mrs. Mac descended upon him and grabbed away the fork.

"Oot o' my kitchen, and this very meenut!" she commanded. "Ye've spiked they biscuits until they look as though they had the measles or some sic disease. And no a word oot o' ye against Georgina! No a word! That lass has done something I didnae think it was in a Sandison to do. I didnae think ony yin o' ye had that much sense."

"What do you mean?" demanded Geordie, from the safe haven of the doorway, pausing in his flight to take umbrage at this reflection on the House of Sandison.

"Marrying siller," said Mrs. Mac. "No, I didnae think it was possible."

"Oh, his old money!" sneered Geordie. "Georgina forgot all about that, or she wouldn't have taken him."

"That's what I'm thanking the Lord for every day o' my life," said the devout but cautious Mrs. Mac. "That yon Erskine caught her that quick she didnae have time till inquire intil his prospects. Ten chances to yin she'd 'a' dischairged him for having the siller. That's you Sandisons."

"Oh, well," retorted Geordie, entering the kitchen boldly and contriving to embrace Mrs. Mac with one arm so heartily that she didn't see his other arm and hand reaching out for currant-cakes, "you like us

GEORGINA UNSETTLES THINGS

so well that you can't leave us; that's saying something."

"It's naething bit a pure sense of juty keeps me here," began Mrs. Mac, and then, catching sight of her depleted "curran-cakies," sprang at him.

Geordie's long legs took him out of her reach. He ran down the path until he was out of danger, and strolled about under the trees. He turned to go and seek out Georgina and her Professor again, if only to be aggravated.

Suddenly he stopped and jumped back. Micky was lying in the long grass behind the tennis-court, his face hidden in his hands; but he wasn't asleep. Geordie was sure of that, for his shoulders were moving in a queer convulsive way. Even as Geordie turned swiftly and ran noiselessly away he knew that Micky was praying.

"Great guns!" Geordie said softly to himself, as he reached the gate angry at the sorrow in his soul. "Isn't there anything in the world—but love?"

He caught sight of Mr. Martin's coachman driving past, and with a loud whoop arrested the staid Tom.

"Take me down-town, Tom, as far as you go? There's a kids' baseball game in Mackay's lots every afternoon. I think I'll umpire that. I'm low-spirited."

"Ain't sickening for any fever, is you?" Tom inquired, anxiously. "Don't pay to git low-spirited these here fall days."

"Tom," replied Geordie, solemnly, "I'm just driven from home. There are too many—girls there."

"Certainly you got a right smart lot of handsome sisters," Tom assented, gravely. "Handsome and at-tractive young ladies is what they is."

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"That's just it," Geordie said, disconsolately. "There are days when I wish they were homely and nobody loved 'em but me. . . . Drive on, Tom, as fast as you can, and let us try to be cheerful, for it's human nature, I suppose," he admitted, sadly.

"It sure am," said Tom, chuckling. "Mister Lenny coming to-night?"

Geordie nodded his head, and, still chuckling, Tom drove on.

But that night, when Sandy came home from town, she watched Georgina and Hollister with a great deal of interest. There was no denying Georgina's evident absorption in that eminent scientist, or his complete ignorance of any one or anything in the world save Georgina.

After dinner the family all went out on the piazza, where the vines are so thick that unless the moonlight is very brilliant or you sit directly in the light of the windows it is difficult to see one's face plainly. Sandy, after watching Georgina settle herself in the darkest corner, observed: "Well, we sha'n't see Micky for a while. He's gone South."

Nancy started, gave Sandy a quick comprehending look, and then put out her hand to keep Geordie from bouncing up from the step at her feet.

"Good Peter and Paul! What struck him?" exclaimed Geordie, indignantly. "He didn't say anything to me about it, and I wanted to go fishing—"

"I met him at the station," Sandy explained, in answer to the chorus of surprise, "and—he's going to Baltimore to go into retreat. You know," she continued, to cover the surprised hush, "his uncle's one of the Fathers there. Micky will be gone a month at least."

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"I wish he'd told a fellow," Leonard said, ruefully. Leonard had turned up, as usual, for Saturday dinner, and was now sitting peacefully at Libbett's feet. "I wanted to see him. Why, I'm lost without Mick!"

"He made up his mind, he told me, late this afternoon," Sandy observed, wondering what Georgina was thinking of.

"I won't be married without Micky," declared Georgina, firmly.

Sandy gave a little gasp and looked for sympathy toward Nancy. It was so characteristic of Georgina to think that Micky was always at her service.

Nancy got up and walked out on the lawn, fearful that she might be tempted to say something to spoil Georgina's beautiful serenity. Geordie came after her hot-foot, his mouth open with amazement.

Nancy quietly took his arm and walked him out of earshot.

"Say," he demanded, "does that mean Georgina threw down our Mick? Go reason with that girl, Nancy! Hollister's all right, but Mick's the best that was ever made."

"I know it, Geordie, but you can't reason people into loving."

"Oh," groaned Geordie, "girls make me sick! I knew some girl was making Micky suffer—this afternoon; but I didn't think it was our Georgy. Oh, girls *do* make me sick! They fall in love when you don't care about it at all. Look at Phyllis and Georgina! They could both easily wait a couple of years or so till I'm ready to go off exploring into life for myself. They would if they cared anything about a fellow. Not that I don't like both of their men all

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right. But Mick! Why, Mick's the pure, refined salt of the earth!"

"Georgina knows that."

"Then why didn't she grab him quick?"

"I don't know," said Nancy. "Geordie, if that's Will Drayton coming across the drive stick to me."

"Like a brother," promised Geordie, grinning.

XX

THE PLAY'S THE THING

GEORGINA'S wedding really did take place right away, so that Georgina was the first to be married from the old house, after all.

Alan came on to give the bride away, and Mary Dean came too, to see his sisters, and found them ready and willing to love her because Alan did.

All except Sandy. Sandy had to struggle with herself. "I believe," she said, guiltily, to Nancy—"I believe I feel like a mother-in-law to her. You see, Alan is—"

"Alan is Alan," replied Nancy, severely, "and don't think you're the only person who feels as though nothing would ever be the same with Alan married. But for pity's sake keep your jealousy to yourself."

"Jealousy!" echoed the indignant Sandy.

Nancy nodded. "There's more than one kind, you know, and if you feel mother-in-lawish depend upon it that's what's the matter with you, and keep it to yourself. You think you won't have Alan any more to pour your plans into his sympathetic ear and plunge your hand into his equally sympathetic pocket. Well, you won't unless you admire his Mary."

Sandy sat down speechless on one of Georgina's trunks to digest this advice.

Nancy went away smiling. "That 'll keep the

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Genius thinking busily for a while," she said to herself, "and prevent a few *faux pas*. I hate 'in-law' troubles, and Sandy's really got to realize that there are other people besides us in the world."

Sandy sat on the trunk and thought hard for a few moments, and then dreamed off into such a lovely dream that Georgina had to shake her to make her move and let the packing proceed.

Nancy's words bore fruit. Sandy took care to be all that she could be, when she tried; and Mary, in consequence, found her "sweet," which showed how very unlike herself Sandy had been.

It was a very quiet wedding. "Sir Charles" was not there. He had gone to the Maine woods for "a little rest" just the week before.

Lieutenant Creighton was there scowling at the whole world, but endeavoring bravely to smile and look pleasant whenever Sandy's eyes rested on him, which was not often. Sandy, although she had said little, had deeply resented his marriage-by-capture plan; all the more deeply because she didn't care.

Micky came. Micky, who had hastily finished his retreat and hurried back at Georgina's command, and now stood gravely looking at the man who had captured his "Rose of the Worrlld," and was about to take her far from them all.

"But I'll come back, Micky," promised Georgina, clinging to his hand when the real farewells began, "and, oh, don't—don't get too holy for me to speak to."

"No fear," said Micky, with an engaging grin.

Sandy's novel was accepted.

It served to keep them all from dwelling on the

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dreadful dullness that had ensued with Georgina gone.

All Egypt began to buy the book. Not that Egypt thought there could be any merit in the tale. It simply wanted to see what "that Sandison girl had done." It was an excellent thing for sales, however, and Sandy rejoiced; although it was rather embarrassing when the grocer leaned across the counter and said: "Next time you're a-writing a book, Miss Sandy, I hope you'll put a nice, fat grocer like me in it."

The novel made a fairly decent ripple in the great yearly pool of literature; but it did not bring a word from the absent Tommy or Joe, and it did not make a fortune. It might have sunk into oblivion speedily and for ever if it had not been that a certain theatrical manager bought a copy.

He was going out to San Francisco to put on one of his productions with a new company, and at the railway-station stopped to buy a novel, not so much to read as to carry some unmounted photographs of his country home which his youngest daughter had developed that morning and thrust into Daddy's overcoat pocket.

"It 'll keep 'em uncreased till I get time to get them mounted," he said, sighing to think how many weeks it would be before he saw Babe again.

In turning over the leaves of the book to place the photographs carefully therein he saw something that interested him. Later, being bored to death by the new leading man he was taking to the Coast, he picked it up in self-defense.

"That man may be a good actor, but he's a dull

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traveling companion," he thought to himself, and turned to the book again.

He saw a play in it. He thought the thing over leisurely, and then, as it persisted in haunting him, he took the book up again, and once more saw a chance for something fresh and new. Something that mothers would like to take their daughters to see. He made a few notes, and when he arrived in San Francisco dictated a letter to Sandy's publishers. Then the publishers sent for Sandy.

It was all very exciting. Nothing was to be done until the manager came back East; but in the mean time Sandy was to think over the matter and see him when he returned.

Sandy did think it over. At first it seemed impossible to her. The very changes necessary to make a good play out of the book revolted her and seemed to spoil all the freshness and sweetness of the book, lay waste all her carefully thought-over character-drawing.

Fortunately, the manager was long in returning to New York, and in the mean time Sandy had gotten used to the idea of a play. More than that, she had become thoroughly interested in it and was plotting out the play for herself.

When the manager returned Sandy went to see him. She found that to reach him required more preliminaries than to see the President of the United States. First letters, then appointments; then the long wait in the anteroom while her card was passed from one to another of the endless chain of go-betweens. Finally it did reach the inner sanctum, for just as Sandy was, in her ignorance of things theatrical, about to give up and go home all

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doors were suddenly thrown open for her and she was ushered into the presence.

The presence proved to be a wonderfully picturesque man with a kind and fatherly manner. So much at her ease did he speedily put Sandy that she quite forgot anything but how interested he was in the book, and found herself launching at once into a rapid outline of how she thought the story might be twisted into an actable play.

In the main the manager seemed to agree with her. Sandy went home happy in the prospect that he meant to trust her to make what he called "a stab" at it. In other words, she was to try her hand at writing the play herself.

This was a great triumph, for the manager had stoutly declared to the publishers, by letter, that he must have the book "knocked into shape" by one of his well-known assistants.

Sandy flew to Meadowbanks, as though on wings, eager to tell the girls. Here at last was her chance to distinguish herself and make a lot of money for the family.

The family, of course, were all deeply interested, full of encouragement, and would have been even more excited had it not been that just then Alan married Mary Dean very quietly in Chicago and at the end of their honeymoon brought her to Meadowbanks to visit the family.

It meant all sorts of festivities both at home and abroad, for Alan had always been a favorite in Egypt.

Mr. Martin kept open house and greatly admired the bride. Alan, urged thereto by Nancy and Libbett, conscientiously tried to use his influence to

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turn Mr. Martin's thoughts toward a reconciliation with Leonard. He met with no success. The very fact that Leonard was succeeding brilliantly at his chosen profession seemed to harden rather than soften his uncle's heart. The prodigal nephew was not eating husks, so what inducement to Uncle to kill the fatted calf?

Sandy found it hard, even if Alan had been away for a long time from home, to get used to the fact that sisters were no longer first with him. It was natural, of course, but nevertheless a little trying, to have him turn every conversation, no matter how you started it, round to Mary and Mary's many perfections.

Doubly hard to Sandy, because Alan had always understood better than any one else in the family Sandy's plans and sympathized with her ambitions.

Fortunately, the play had to be finished in a given time; therefore Sandy had to withdraw herself from most of the festivities and work hard, which was good for her.

The girls had all been so interested in the book that they rather objected to the changes necessary to make a play, consequently Sandy didn't want to discuss it with them until it was completed. She must, however, have an audience and adviser. She looked about her craftily and pounced upon Micky. He submitted gracefully.

Micky seemed to have something on his mind these days, and was oftener away fishing and hunting than formerly. He was a puzzle not only to his father, who had quite given him up, but to his friends.

He proved a keen judge of Sandy's material—

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sharp-witted, quick, always to be relied on. Sometimes, in the midst of their reading and discussing, Sandy would look up to find Micky's eyes on the dim blue line of the Orange Mountains, and such a far-away look on his face that she could hardly believe he had been listening or was worked up to the proper pitch by her climax. Yet his criticism was so just and true that Sandy never dared call him to account. Besides, there was an extra sweetness and gravity about their careless Micky nowadays that made him, though more than ever engaging, harder to approach.

The play progressed. Sandy daily grew more enamoured of it. Finally she took the complete copy to the manager's office and read it to the manager and the leading man. It was a terrible ordeal. Sandy's cheeks grew hot; Sandy's hands grew cold, and her voice hoarse; but still she read on.

When she had finished, the actor said some words of praise that raised her up to the seventh heaven. The next moment the manager brought her to earth with a thud. He began picking out "things that had been done before." They must be "cut out." Other things which "had not been done before" must still be taken away, for they "wouldn't go."

By the time he was through, Sandy, with a fixed smile on her face, had black hatred in her heart for this cheerful man who tore months of work apart and threw it aside as though it were a cobweb.

When he had finished, the other man began the same process from a different standpoint.

Finally, as she listened, the enraged Sandy began to cool and see what they really wanted. It was hard enough when she understood, but it was possible.

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She gathered her precious manuscript to her heart, and, though observing the usual forms of politeness and hearing her own voice coolly promising to be ready with the changes within a few weeks, went home in a mist of doubt and anguish, a prey to terrible misgivings. Was she just a conceited fool, or was the work absolutely without merit?

After a sleepless night she went to the publishers' office to talk it over with the man who had arranged for the dramatization of the book. Fortunately, she related her experience to him without comment and waited for his. Afterward she was very glad that she had said nothing. He seemed to think that she had done remarkably well. Utter rejection had been, she found, the usual fate of a novelist's first attempt at play-writing. This man seemed to think her a lucky young woman, and made light of the changes.

Saying nothing of her wounded pride, Sandy gathered up the shreds and patches and went home to weld them into a play again. This time she succeeded in almost doing it. The manager informed her that she was "nearer the mark," and handed the play back for a new second act and several other "minor" changes.

"Give it up, Sandy," begged the girls, wearied with watching her agonize over it. "He's only playing with you, anyway. He'll never produce it." Sandy couldn't give it up. Already it had held her next book back, and she must prove that she could carry the thing through. Once more she strained and racked mind and body and finished a new version.

By this time the manager was so busy with some-

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thing else that it required both time and persistence to recall the play to his memory. His interest did revive for a brief period, and Sandy had the pleasure of hearing that the last bit of work was "something like," and doubtless the play would do now, "except for changes during rehearsal."

This made production sound very near, and Sandy returned home happy and exultant.

"It will be only a few weeks now, girls, before we begin rehearsals," she announced, gleefully.

It was three whole years!

XXI

THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

DURING those three years the magazine, with Nancy in charge, had struggled along, just keeping its head above water through the unconquerable zeal of its editor-in-chief. How Sandy longed for money to "back" it and show Nancy how much she believed in it—and her.

Will Drayton longed to do the same thing, and offered to do it; but Nancy quietly and firmly refused to take his money. She knew very well that to allow him to finance the magazine meant seeing a great deal of Will Drayton, and Nancy wasn't quite sure she wanted to.

There was always Leonard in the background. Leonard, of course, had no money to back anything; but between Nancy and Leonard there always had been the strong bond of similar tastes, age, and long-standing friendship. While Leonard had never said "anything," still there he was; and Nancy had really thought very little of any one else until Will Drayton began to show "symptoms." Even then "symptoms" aren't everything, and a man like Will Drayton, older, richer, and more socially prominent than the others of their set, must have shown "symptoms" many a time and oft.

Sandy, who had always admired Will, was quite

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openly his advocate; but that counted for little with Nancy. Everybody knew that Sandy had an imagination as vivid as her hair, and that ever since she had been in his office Sandy had idealized Will Drayton.

Nancy had liked him, too, of course, and he had been kind; even when she was a little, raw school-girl; but, unfortunately, the Draytons had always been associated in Nancy's mind with money in its most brutal sense, with people who cared for nothing else but money and the things money bought, to whom the true pleasures of friendship and simple living were nothing—and meant nothing.

Now, while, being a normal young woman, Nancy had a decided liking for the things money could buy, she did not love it or them overweeningly, and thought people who did the dullest of company.

In vain Sandy defended her friend, feeling, as she did, that his brother's abrupt departure and long silence had embittered Will and prejudiced many people, Nancy included, against him. "He's all very well in his place, my dear," was the sole response of Miss Nancy-the-Critical, "but his place is not here, nor his ways our ways."

"Oh, give him a chance, Nancy," pleaded Sandy. "You don't know how he would enjoy it if you would once take him into our circle and let him be simple, too."

Somehow Nancy didn't seem able to do this; and Will Drayton found himself outside, little dreaming that it was because of the very thing that bought him an entry into other charmed circles. Very sweetly and kindly was it done, for Nancy was both sweet and kind; but the fact remained, Will was outside.

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"We like people for themselves," said the proud Sandisons, and, as no opportunity arrived for Will to show his real self, Nancy, who had always seemed to Will his ideal of all a woman should be, passed him by as "mere money."

Sandy was very much disturbed at this state of affairs. Afraid to say too much to Nancy, yet distressed that Will should be dismissed without being really known, she would have taken a more active part in the little drama and probably brought it to a speedy and undesirable end if it had not been for Micky.

Micky, from being Sandy's critic-in-ordinary, had grown to be a sort of father-confessor. She was vaguely hinting to him her wish that Nancy wasn't so critical, especially as to Will, when Micky stopped her.

"Don't say that," he said, more sharply than Sandy had ever heard him speak before. "Don't ever try to interfere in those things, Sandy. Your touch isn't delicate enough. No one's is. Now I"—and he smiled at her again—"have been worrying about something very different. I have been wondering very much whether it will hurt Nancy when you all wake up—to that—" And he nodded his head toward the wood road down which Leonard and Libbett were disappearing.

"What?" said Sandy, sitting bolt upright and staring at Micky.

After a little silence Sandy said: "Has—has Leonard said anything?"

"I don't think either of them really know it—yet," said Micky, quietly; "but it's very plain to see. Plain to any one who knows—the signs," he

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added, with such a look of pain on his thin face that Sandy seemed to see further into the real Micky's soul than she had ever seen before. "Will it hurt Nancy? Will it? It's a terrible—hurt."

Sandy looked at him frightened. "I don't know," she answered, helplessly, "and, anyway, what can I do?"

"Nothing," said Micky. "It's in God's hands. We must just be ready to help."

Sandy looked at him in awe. He was a curious mixture, this Micky—one moment seemingly nothing but the most heedless and graceless of good-natured Irishmen; the next the most ready to speak of God with a singular clearness and nearness that made you stand in awe of him.

"It's the religious Celt in him," Sandy murmured to herself; but that didn't entirely explain it.

"I wanted you to know," he was saying, "and stand ready to help when I am gone."

"What are you going to do, Micky?" Sandy heard herself asking in an awe-stricken whisper.

"Study for the priesthood," said Micky, cheerfully but reverently. "I'm going South to the seminary very soon now."

"Before Georgina comes back?" said Sandy, and could have bitten her heedless tongue for the speech.

"Yes," replied Micky, gravely, "before Georgina comes back. I'm a little late in making up my mind, you see, and I've no time to lose."

"And your father?" asked Sandy.

"Father's well pleased," said Micky.

"Oh, Micky," murmured Sandy, and stopped.

"Oh, Micky, I—I hope you will be happy."

"Sure I'll be happy," smiled Micky, "and at

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peace, which is better than happiness. Don't tell the others yet awhile, Sandy; but it's a comfort to have you know."

"Oh, Mick," breathed Sandy again, helplessly, remembering all that Micky had done for her and feeling singularly sad that she could not be of help and comfort to him, "I wish I could do something for you."

"You can," said Micky. "Harden not your heart, Sandy."

Sandy sat and stared at him.

"That's what you are doing," he said. "You closed it up tight some time ago, and—and you're getting very worldly now, Sandy."

Again Sandy's eyes widened.

"I don't mean only that you desire money," he said, slowly, "although you do, for you are very ambitious. You care a great deal for fame and fortune, though not for fortune without fame."

"It doesn't come very fast for all my caring," exclaimed Sandy, bitterly. "I planned to do—everything—for the family, and look, Micky, they are doing the things themselves."

"Well," smiled Micky, "isn't it a God's providence that they are? The Sandisons are not a particularly meek and accepting lot of people, and you—you've the makings in you of a complete little dictator. What would you be like if you could sit in high places and dispense largess?" And he smiled mockingly at her.

"And you think my heart is hard?" commented Sandy.

"Hardening," said Micky, "and I pity you. Take care." Then, as Sandy looked at him imp-

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ishly, Micky added, gravely: "I feel a certain responsibility for you, Sandy." And as Sandy turned on him astonished eyes he smiled. "You see, long ago I promised Tommy Wilks I'd look after you and help you if—and whenever I could."

"Well, you've done it," Sandy stammered, gratefully. "But, oh, Micky, when did you promise—when did you hear—from them?"

"When he went away," Micky answered, and hesitated as though he thought it best to say no more. Sandy had a feeling that he could, but somehow dared not question him lest she disturb the soothing feeling that his words had given her. Somewhere—wherever they were—Tommy and Joe cared.

Sandy, of course, dismissed what Micky said about her hard heart, as "just Micky," but she pondered long and diligently over Nancy's problem, watching with anxious eyes the unconscious Libbett and Nancy, wondering how it would work itself out and what she could do.

Before she could do anything the manager, who had lost heavily on a foreign importation of plays, turned Sandy's manuscript over to an ambitious younger man who had been preaching American plays for Americans and told him to go ahead and see what he could do with it. He was to rehearse it in New York and then take the company to a small Western town and "try it out." If it went he could bring it by slow stages, getting the rough places smoothed as they came along, to New York. It sounded well. Theatrical propositions always sound well, and are skilfully manipulated so to sound.

Sandy was pleased, but a trifle skeptical. "When

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it is on," she said, "I will believe it. Any time another three years' wait may occur."

This time it actually did go through smoothly. Sandy attended rehearsals daily in the city, taking leave of business to do so. It was, she felt, now or never with her, and she would not lose this chance. The girls enthusiastically cheered her on, and believed in her so heartily that she felt something must come of it.

With rehearsals began Sandy's initiation into the nerve-racking experiences of a playwright. If it was bliss to hear your own words taking life from the actor's lips, it was agony to have the managerial blue pencil strike out your finest "bits" because they "held up the scene."

To Sandy, trained as a business woman, the most impressive thing in this new field of enterprise was the apparently reckless waste of time, money, and energy. To her question, "Why cannot a new production be managed economically and carefully like any other business proposition?" she could get no satisfactory answer. It had always been done this way; and, apparently, only a few choice souls could conceive of it being done any other way.

To the novice things grew more chaotic day by day, as rehearsals grew longer and more strenuous, and the actors and actresses, bothered by delays—uncalled-for delays, they seemed to Sandy—of costumers and scene-painters, grew utterly worn and fagged out. The strain, to Sandy, became terrific, and, working with the same words day by day, the very words began to lose their meaning. It took all Sandy's self-control to keep from throwing the play into the fire and going to Mr. Bill Morrison,

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the manager, with the news that it was perfect trash.

Just as things and people seemed to Sandy to be getting more and more impossible, and not to be borne, the whole company went West for the first performance, for which Sandy was sure they were none of them ready.

Sandy went with the company under the wing of Mr. Morrison's wife. It was her first really long journey by rail, and, save for her ever-present and gnawing anxiety as to the fate of the play, the whole thing was hugely enjoyable. The people of the company were delightful traveling companions. They seemed, in their constant going to and fro upon the "road," to have arrived at the solution of the "how to travel" problem. They were always there, if you wanted them, and perfectly content to let you alone if you didn't. They took the discomforts that arose—such as dining-cars suddenly cut off and no food possible for hours—with good-natured jests. True, at times their outlook on life, manners, and customs was strange to Sandy; but, even so, these whole-souled and kindly people laid no undue stress on their own view, and one needn't conform unless one wanted to.

All the way out Sandy had been impressed by the bare and wooden outlines of the little Western towns. When they finally arrived at their destination she found it just such another, with a spick and span newness and uniformity of building; but behind this town were the everlasting hills. Sandy felt strangely comforted as she gazed at them. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," she quoted softly to herself, "from whence cometh my help."

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In the cab on their way to the hotel she could not help but note that this town had an exceedingly prosperous and well-governed appearance; and, remarking this to Mr. Morrison, she was entertained with a little of the town's history. The Morrises had played there several times before. It had one of the youngest mayors in the United States, he said—a fellow who could not be more than thirty-one, at the most, and one of the cleverest politicians in the state. He had beaten the whole machine gang and gotten himself and the district attorney in by appealing to and organizing the younger men and making the "better class" recognize their duty as citizens and vote.

"He had the decent working-men, anyway," Mr. Morrison explained, enthusiastically, "by the things he wanted to do for the town and the children; and he shamed the others into it. Now they're so proud of themselves for doing it they support everything and anything he advocates. He's cut the claws of the political grafters in this town, and don't you forget it."

"Must be interesting," ventured Sandy, stealing another look at the hills through the cab window.

"Sure he is," said Mr. Morrison; "good-looking, too, and a bachelor. Get you an introduction."

"Oh," laughed Sandy, "I'd just as soon admire him from afar. There won't be anything in life but this play for me until it's on its feet."

"Bet you!" agreed Mr. Morrison, kindly, and with sympathy, for his money was in the venture. "There's some suffering ahead of her yet, ain't there, Cal?" he asked his wife, winking solemnly at her. Mrs. Morrison knew the business thoroughly—

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in fact, was her husband's right hand in all his ventures. She nodded a little wearily. "But if you stick to it, my girl," Morrison went on, "you'll find it pays."

"Oh, I'll stick," laughed Sandy; but that afternoon she felt much more like crying out and going home. The scenery was delayed; the leading lady had a cold; and on the eve of that terrible event—an all-night dress rehearsal—word came from the theater that the city authorities were doubtful about allowing the play to go on, owing to the age of the youngest member of the cast. This same youngest member had one of the most important parts. The character was that of a boy of twelve; but in order to conform with the law they had trained a girl of sixteen to play it in states where the law would not permit the fourteen-year-old boy, who had also been rehearsed in the part in New York, to appear. It was doubly hard, when they were acting carefully and honestly, to be held up. They could not afford to be handicapped in this way on the first night.

Mr. Morrison, to whom this news was brought as he was lunching with his wife and the weary Sandy, frowned over the information. Sandy, who had been up almost all the night before on the train rewriting one of the short scenes in the second act, watched him anxiously. The first course was eaten in silence, for Bill was thinking and neither of the women wished to interfere with his reasoning-powers. Finally, as fish was brought on, he said: "None of that for me, and you two take my advice and leave it lay. This is too far inland for fish."

They meekly let it go and turned to salad. Bill Morrison continued to think.

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At coffee Bill looked up smiling, and, meeting Sandy's anxious eye, took out his watch. "Now, Miss Sandison," he said, "how long will it take you to finish your luncheon and get your hat on?"

"Not five minutes," announced Sandy, eagerly. "I have had all I want to eat."

"Well," Mr. Morrison drawled, grinning at her eagerness, "no hurry; but run along and get yourself prinked up, and we'll go together to the Mayor's office and explain. I bet that's the shortest cut to setting things right. This is the work of some little cocky subordinate which the Mayor don't know anything about. He'll see we're acting straight and are as anxious to keep the law as he is, and he won't let any trifling grafting game hold us up."

"Will he see you?" asked Mrs. Morrison, as Sandy rose.

"Sure thing," said Bill. "I'll make him; and if he won't see me he's sure to see our author."

Sandy hurried away and returned in a short time ready and anxious to go. Anything was better than waiting about in the hotel for rehearsal-time. They couldn't get the theater for rehearsal, anyway, until eleven that night, when the company now playing there would finish their engagement.

Sandy hadn't yet learned to sleep in the day-time, and to lie on her bed with wide-open eyes, every bone in her body crying out for the rest she had denied it for three long weeks, yet unable to sleep, was too terrible an ordeal. Had she not tried it, while, marshaled before her, came all the disasters of the day and such new ones as her lively imagination and tired nerves suggested to her? No, thanks! This

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was better. It was doing something for the play, anyway, and might be interesting.

It was. Bill himself, honest, kindly, and well-informed, proved a perfect mine of reminiscence. The man who sat in the Mayor's chair had a large share of his admiration, so on the way up Sandy had pointed out to her the improvements dating from his Honor's election, and a short, terse, slangy history of his fight for the same. Sandy heard how, in order that there might be no "come-backs" about grafting, he had published in all the papers in the town a list of the different local investments he was interested in, with the terse statement: "These are the companies I have put my money in. Watch if I favor them unduly. See if when I leave the City Hall I have taken more than my due share of profit as an ordinary shareholder."

Sandy was about to ask what the name of this marvel, always alluded to as "his Honor" or "the Mayor," was, when they reached the City Hall, and Bill began to use all his conversation and diplomacy to force his way through to the private office, carrying Sandy with him.

It was a marvelous feat of social engineering, and done with such perfect good faith and good nature that Sandy was lost in admiration.

They finally reached the green-baize door with the tiny glass bull's-eye windows. It swung noiselessly inward to admit them into a square, business-like room with dark walls and heavy mahogany furniture.

She heard the young man who had guided them thus far pronounce Bill's name and step aside. A strong, athletic young man sitting behind the big

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flat desk rose and came toward them, his hand outstretched.

Sandy's eyes met his, and she stopped, then took a step in front of Mr. Morrison, both hands outstretched. She felt them grasped firmly in the Mayor's strong ones, and the Mayor said: "Sandy! What are you doing here?"

It was Tommy Wilks.

XXII

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"**W**HY didn't you tell me you knew him?" asked Mr. Morrison, as they walked back to the hotel together.

"Why didn't you tell me his name?" laughed Sandy, gaily. "You said nothing but the Mayor and 'his Honor,' and I hadn't heard from Tommy in years." She grew suddenly grave when she remembered how many. Nine years since Tommy and Joe had fled from Egypt.

All that Tommy had said when she reproached him was, "I wasn't quite ready, and I want to be quite ready before I go back."

Just what he meant by "quite ready" Sandy hoped to hear after the play's first performance. Tommy and Joe were coming to see the play and would meet her afterward.

Mr. Morrison was delighted at the stroke of "good business" he had unwittingly done by bringing Sandy along.

Tommy had said little about Joe, but, fortunately, Mr. Morrison had not been equally reticent, and Sandy managed to glean from him a few facts of the District Attorney's history. Evidently, the Drayton instinct for the law had been fully developed in Joe, and his fight with Tommy against the local machine had been spectacular.

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"Material for a play in it," Mr. Morrison said, enthusiastically.

"Oh yes," laughed Sandy, "but you see I'm not looking for material. I'm looking for old friends."

After Sandy had gone the Mayor sent one of his messengers to court asking the District Attorney to come and see him as soon as court adjourned. He came, an older and handsomer Joe, with a peculiar frailty of appearance which increased his uncommon good looks.

"Well, Tommy?" he asked, finding his Honor and himself alone in the room. "What's up? Anything new in the case?"

"No," said Tommy, smiling; "like the flowers that bloom in the spring, this has nothing to do with the case, but it has a great deal to do with us. Sandy's here. It's her play."

Joe sat suddenly upright and stared at him. "Sandy! What's her play? What are you talking about?"

"The new play coming to the Empire. Sandy's written it, and I've promised that the city shall be represented at the first performance by the Mayor and the District Attorney. We'll get the whole town there and give it a rousing reception."

Joe's eyes, which had been fixed on Tommy, were withdrawn and fixed on the ceiling. The District Attorney lit a cigar before he spoke.

"What does she look like?" he asked.

"Same," answered Tommy, "only, of course, older—and—and better-looking."

"H'm," said Joe, "and literary?"

"Not so you would notice it," Tommy replied. "Talks the same funny Sandison mixture of slang

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and English. It was good to hear again. She's pretty smart-looking. I rather guess the girls would look after that, anyway. They wouldn't let her slump, even if she wanted to."

"Tell you anything about—Egypt?"

"Lots," Tommy answered, "and more to follow. Georgina's married."

"Little Georgina? Micky?"

Tommy shook his head. "A stranger. A Professor Erskine, an Egyptologist or something."

"Oh yes," said Joe, "I know. Heaps of money. Well?"

"Phyllis is engaged to Doc Morland, and Alan's married a Chicago girl."

Joe nodded. "Heard that."

"Well, will you go to the play?"

"Of course." And Joe rose.

Tommy rose himself and looked at Joe keenly.

"Don't go yet, Joseph, my son."

"I've a lot to do," Joe answered.

"So have I, but we will have plenty of time to do it in, and this kind of thing only happens once."

"Sandy's forced your hand a little by coming here instead of sitting quietly at home waiting, hasn't she?" Joe asked, smiling.

"A little," admitted Tommy, "but I don't mind; my term expires next month, anyway, and it was worth having a few plans thrown out to see Sandy again."

"So you say," commented Joe. "Sandy must have improved."

"Not altogether," replied honest Tommy. "She looks healthy and well and splendid, and, oh—all that Sandy is; but—well, she looks a little hard."

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"That is also what Sandy is," said Joe.

"I think it's more looks than—reality," Tommy declared, "and—" He stopped short.

Joe turned and looked at him curiously. "Well, Tom?"

Tommy stood in one of the deep windows looking at the sunset over the roofs of the city he had helped "clean up." For a moment there was silence in the room, and then Tommy turned, hesitated, and blurted out: "Never said anything before, but I guess you know how I've felt about Sandy—right from the first."

Joe nodded, looking at him curiously.

"Well, I want you to know that I feel it more than ever, and—" Again Tommy stopped abruptly.

"And you are going in to win," supplied Joe, curling himself back leisurely in the big chair and regarding Tommy grimly. Then, after a while, as Tommy said nothing:

"What have I to do with it? Are you waiting for my blessing or my sanction—or what?"

He gave Tommy one of those keen, still glances which usually flurried the witness even before the District Attorney began cross-examining.

Tommy wasn't looking at him.

"I speak because it's critical for—Sandy," Tommy said, slowly. "I'll tell you how it struck me today. Sandy's been asleep—emotionally ever since—well, ever since we went away. She's been too much engrossed in doing things, in getting along, to have cared very much about the men who helped or hindered her getting along. I can see that—plainly. Nobody counts much—that way—with

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her. She's shut that part of herself up, and when—well, being Sandy, when the door opens it 'll open wide. She won't keep back—anything."

"Well?"

"And," answered Tommy, evenly, "since you make me say it, Sandy's not to be waked up to 'might-have-beens.'"

Again there was that queer, restless silence; then Joe said: "I can't resent it from you, Tom; but aren't you taking a great deal for granted?"

"I always have," admitted Tommy, "and I always will, but generally I'm right. I know I'm right about Sandy. I know a lot depends on what is done and said now."

"Sandy probably knows that I'm married," observed Joe, quietly.

"I don't think she does," said Tommy, as quietly, "and when she is told Sandy may feel a little as though she's quite lost her old friend—nothing else, unless you tell her—"

"That I married Beatrice in a moment of head-long folly?"

"That's it," interrupted Tommy, anxiously. "See what I'm driving at, don't you?"

"No," said Joe.

"Well," Tommy began again, "It would disturb and distress Sandy—"

Joe looked at him, without speaking.

"It would look as if you were asking for sympathy, and," Tommy added, quietly, "you might get it."

Joe turned and looked at Tommy in surprise.

"Oh yes, you might; and you'd both call it just sympathy. Sandy's a clean-minded girl, as well as

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a clever one, and that's the way it would look—to her. But the door would never be opened then, and Sandy's life would have a starved side."

"Well," said Joe, softly, "that's life. Even if I say nothing the same thing might happen."

"Not it," declared Tommy, confidently; "Sandy's proud. She's got heaps of pride. Left to herself, she'll come to the truthful conclusion that that—youthful business—didn't count for much, after all. Anyway, you won't be—"

"Spoiling the other man's chances," supplied Joe, with a weary smile.

"Just as you like," said Tommy. "Make me as small as you please, Joe, provided you do the best thing for the girl. It's simple, maybe, but it's critical, and—God knows it's hard for both of us."

It was Joe who turned this time and walked to the window and after a moment came back again and faced Tommy.

"You might have given me credit for a few feelings of my own, Tommy," he said, with his old smile, "as well as a little less conceit."

"I'm a blundering fool, I know," admitted Tommy, contritely, "only you see—it's Sandy."

Joe laughed. "I warn you she's probably a very different Sandy from the one you think she is. The years change us all, Tommy."

"Yes," said Tommy, "in some ways and some things; but there are bits of us that never grow up at all, and I think—no, I'm sure—we still loom large to Sandy. Remember how she sent me—to look after you?"

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"I remember," Joe cut in, quickly. "You had a pretty tough job of it at first, too, didn't you?"

"So-so," admitted Tommy, reminiscently. "You certainly ripped loose from your moorings when you left Egypt."

"Well, you saved me from serious damage," said Joe, rising and stretching himself, "in all but two respects."

"Two?" questioned Tommy.

"Two," repeated Joe. "Marriage—and health."

Tommy swung round and looked at him. "Feeling rocky again, Joe?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, so-so," answered Joe; "nothing to worry about."

But Tommy did look worried. "Is Beatrice—" he began and stopped.

"Oh no," Joe said, easily. "The last remittance was large enough to make Beatrice perfectly happy for a time at a brand-new health resort with a quite new set of 'nerves.' When the novelty's gone and the money spent I suppose she will announce her return, but until then—"

Tommy sighed.

"Cheer up, Tommy," Joe advised. "You are still single."

"Yep," said Tommy, with a grin. "Strange, but that doesn't always seem a blessing."

Joe was striding toward the door.

"We'll both see Sandy to-morrow," he began, "and I leave it to you to tell her—everything, Tommy. I'll do the wisest thing—for myself. I'll keep entirely out of it."

Tommy started after him; but the door swung to,

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and he could hear Joe going rapidly along the corridor.

"Now I wonder," said Tommy to himself, "if I've been too crude. Well, I can't help it"—and he took up an official document and affixed his seal, savagely; "somebody's got to look after Sandy."

XXIII

A GOOD INVESTMENT

SANDY, like others, had read and heard of the wonders of overnight success as a dramatic author, and, like others, she found that these wonders are mostly to be read of, not experienced.

Her first night was a night of agony. Everything that the stage carpenters, property men, and actors could "slip up on" they slipped on, and the result, to over-sensitive Sandy, with a clear view of what she wanted the people to witness—what the play could be—was long drawn-out-agony.

Fortunately, the audience was not composed of anxious playwrights and did not share her sufferings. They liked the play. The company did nobly, playing with such zest that only a carping critic, such as sat in the author's box, could find fault with them. The house, owing greatly, had she known it, to the indefatigable Tommy, was a large one, and there was continued and hearty applause. From the opposite box the Mayor and the District Attorney beamed approval.

It was only the fact of their presence that kept poor tired Sandy up. She would have liked to crawl into some dark corner and give way to tears.

When the performance was over she went behind the scenes to thank the company, and to be greeted

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by Mr. Morrison and the New York representative with: "Well, it went *here* all right. *But* it wants a lot of pulling together, and the second-act curtain's all wrong."

Sandy had thought her work all over with the first performance!

Then began a rapid consultation as to when the next rehearsal would be held. Sandy had likewise ignorantly thought rehearsals were all over.

From their talk she also gleaned that Tommy, who believed that looking after the town's welfare meant providing good amusements at reasonable prices, owned some of the theater stock. The play bid fair to be popular, for it was both clean and amusing. With Tommy on their side they were sure to get along, cover expenses and more for the week they stayed there, and "lick it into shape" for further trial.

Tommy came behind and congratulated Sandy heartily. He, too, had liked the play. After a few words the manager and he had gone aside to talk, leaving Sandy patiently going over some of her notes with the assistant stage manager.

Finally Tommy crossed to her. "Let some of them wait until to-morrow, won't you, Sandy?" he asked. "Come along to supper. Mr. and Mrs. Morrison are waiting with Joe."

Sandy looked at him and laughed aloud. Tommy smiled down at her. "Are we laughing at the same thing?" he asked.

"I'm laughing to think of Joe and you and me being chaperoned by the Morrisons," she said. Tommy grinned at her.

"It does seem a little funny, considering Egypt. Doesn't it?"

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"Rather," agreed Sandy, still smiling.

"But," said Tommy, "we must, as my old grandfather used to say, 'consider the speech of people.' By the way, Sandy, I don't know whether you have heard of Joe's marriage or not?"

"I heard a rumor to that effect," answered Sandy, quietly, after a moment's pause, "shortly after Beatrice Bunn left town. But—I didn't see—Was she here to-night?"

Tommy shook his head. "Beatrice is seldom here. She finds this town dull. It doesn't agree with her health."

"Then it was—Beatrice?" said Sandy.

"Yes; Beatrice Bunn," confirmed Tommy. "In Honolulu, where her company was stranded, and where Joe was trying to run himself on the rocks. I did my best, Sandy, but"—then enthusiastically—"Joe—Joe's a splendid fellow."

Sandy said nothing, and on the way back to the hotel, where Joe and the Morrisons had preceded them, Tommy told Sandy something about the last nine years. Joe's part lost nothing in Tommy's telling.

Sandy listened with a queer feeling that she didn't know this Tommy, familiar as he had seemed to her. Was this the boy the girls of Egypt didn't ask to their houses because—well, he just wasn't, you know, anything but that "Tommy Wilks"?

She followed Tommy breathlessly through the first years of travel and reckless experiment. "Prospecting," he called it. Stopping here and there when impulse called; ready for anything. Gentleman adventurers of their day they had been, and through all Tommy's reticences Sandy could read that it was Joe who made their adventures colorful.

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It was Joe who had refused to settle down and take hold of anything worth while; it was Joe who had steadily refused to face life seriously, seeking only amusement from day to day, and always dragging after him Tommy, true to his bargain with her.

After a while she began to realize that something—could it have been Beatrice?—had brought Joe to a full stop and made him take thought for the morrow. Tommy told her how they had come to this town because of Joe's health, which had begun to show signs of failing. "Ah, that was it," Sandy said to herself, and shuddered to remember town gossip of the old Drayton inheritance and hope it was not to be Joe's. The climate agreed with him, Tommy explained, and now they began to work, work hard, on the lines that Tommy had, as he said, "bitten out for himself."

They had made money once or twice in their wanderings. Tommy had invested it wisely. Now he made more and began to plant himself firmly and get his chance to go into politics.

Tommy, full of his theme, explained to Sandy his working theory: In America men went into politics as a mere means of livelihood or a money-making scheme, therefore it failed to attract the right sort of men. It was a shifty way of making a living, problematical; hence shifty people and graft. Tommy's theory was that political prominence should be a great distinction; office a reward for public service or a chance for a man to distinguish himself in the people's service. Joe and he, full of enthusiasm, had started in with this little town as a field for experiment. They had cleaned it up, made it

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fine and healthy politically, and let loose their theories to see how they worked.

How they had worked! The town was something like a growing town should be, and, as far as they knew, there was no grafting in high places. Likewise there was, as nearly as could be arranged in this uneven world and under the present system, a fair share of justice for each citizen, be he good or bad.

Sandy's heart swelled with pride in them both as she listened. Trained to an intelligent interest in politics since childhood, through Father's absorption therein, her quick mind followed the enthusiastic Tommy, and they both found the hotel entrance looming before them far too soon.

Joe greeted Sandy warmly, but seemed to her more like some agreeable, clever stranger than the Joe she used to know. She found herself turning to Tommy constantly as the one who most surely remembered and understood. Joe felt this as he watched this new-old Sandy with eyes that saw everything and admitted nothing.

It was a pleasant little supper party, though Sandy's heart was still torn with anxiety for the fate of her play. She tried to conceal this, however, and was surprised at the exceeding cheerfulness of Mr. Morrison, not realizing that, although this was her "first night," he had lived through many.

Mrs. Morrison broke up the party early, for, as she reminded them, there was still much work and little sleep before Sandy. They rehearsed at 11.30 to-morrow morning, and before that time Mr. Morrison hoped Sandy would have some idea of how to change the last half of the second act. Poor

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Sandy felt that never any more would she have any ideas. A feeling which she discreetly kept to herself as she went away meekly with Mrs. Morrison, leaving the three men still talking.

As they disappeared down the corridor Tommy said, looking straight at Mr. Morrison, "Well?"

"Well," that gentleman returned, easily, "the play's all right; but it will need going over and patching up and a good deal of pushing. Then there's no doubt it will be a go."

Joe looked at Tommy with a faint smile, as though he was about to say something, then sat quite still and smoked slowly.

"I know a little about the business," began Tommy, modestly. Mr. Morrison's shrewd eyes twinkled. He had heard how Tommy had put the one first-class theater in the town on a paying basis, and several "low-class" places of amusement completely out of business. It was a piece of work the cleverness of which he could fully appreciate. Tommy's belief that the people's pleasures were as important as any other part of their welfare was eminently practical. "So let's get down to facts," Tommy went on, quietly. "How about your New York office? Will they give it its chance, and you time to pull it together, or, with the usual theatrical short-sightedness, will they cut off a metropolitan show and put it into cold storage if it isn't an instantaneous hit in a little one-horse 'road' town?"

"I hear," said Mr. Morrison, slowly, realizing that here was a man with whom he needn't waste words or mince matters, "the Old Man's just got hold of another show that will fill his theater, and if this takes too long to buck up, or the New York repre-

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sentative gets cold feet thinking it over on the way home—why—”

“Just so,” commented Tommy, shrewdly, and looked at Joe. Joe nodded and ceased smoking.

“Suppose,” said Joe, “some one else was to take a share in the production now, cash down, would that give the thing a new lease of life?”

“Sure,” answered Mr. Morrison, promptly. “If I had five thousand dollars cash now I could take this play to San Francisco, where I got friends, and could get a theater there and give it a long run, if it caught on, and bring it to New York after Christmas, which would be a better time, anyway. And—”

“There’s your New York representative over there at the next table,” interrupted Joe, rising. “You talk it over with him to-night.”

“And come down,” finished Tommy, “the first thing in the morning and let me know the verdict. Drayton here will draw up any papers I need. He’s my lawyer.”

Morrison nodded and made a bee-line for the New York man.

Joe and Tommy walked home together. Tommy’s bachelor apartment was Joe’s place of refuge during Beatrice’s frequent and prolonged absences in search of excitement and what she called “rest.”

“Say it,” said Tommy, breaking a long silence, “if you want to, Joe, but I don’t think I’m a complete fool. I believe the thing’s a good investment.”

“I don’t deny it may be,” Joe answered, easily. “It’s all chance. It is a clever bit of work, and it does need pulling together—that’s all.” Tommy nodded.

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"What do you think of Sandy?" he asked.

Joe's eyes flashed at him such a look of scorn that it was lucky the absorbed Tommy failed utterly to see it.

"I never think of Sandy in that way," Joe said. "Sandy's just—Sandy. I can't regard her as a stranger—or an author, if that's what you mean?"

"Don't get ruffled about it. I just wondered if you were pleased or disappointed."

Joe looked at him again in despair. Tommy was "impossible" to-night.

"Well," Tommy began again, unable to keep quiet any longer, "she's all my fancy painted her, and more—lots more. Got grit. Any other girl would have been a pulpy mass of collapse after a night like to-night. Sandy's got lots of courage—"

"And physical strength," added Joe, and sighed. "She's a young Amazon. She doesn't feel some things—"

"That's where you read her all wrong," said Tommy. "She put up a good front because it was the thing to do, but for two pins she'd been glad to put her head on somebody's shoulder and cry."

"Sandy!" Joe laughed. "Your own feelings lead you astray, Thomas. Sandy's strong as iron and hard as nails."

"Wrong! She's been fighting her own way. She's been forced to fight, and she doesn't dare let down. But Sandy's got heaps of—feelings. Why, where were your eyes, Joe?" he said, suddenly. "There were tears in hers when she said 'Good night.'"

"Fatigue. It gets some people that way. I'm going to turn in right now, Tommy."

"Oh, smoke awhile, Joe," begged Tommy. "I've

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lots of things to talk over. I've made up my mind to one thing: I'm going to give Sandy the time of her young life now, while she's here. You see, Joe," he continued, disregarding that tired young man's weary sigh, "Sandy's been looking after herself too long."

"She's perfectly capable of doing it, too," sneered Joe, "and likes it. She doesn't want any assistance, either. You don't know your Sandy if you think she does."

"It's you who don't know her," insisted Tommy, enthusiastically. "She's much more in need of it than some of these pick-me-up-and-carry-me-please sort of girls. It's part of their stock in trade to lean hard and heavily, and that makes Sandy's kind of girl despise it and fly to the other extreme. I'm going to make Sandy try—leaning."

"Sandy!" Joe laughed again. "She's forgotten how, and, anyway, she wouldn't like the sensation."

Tommy turned to annihilate him, and Joe went on hastily, his hand on his bedroom door: "I've only one word of warning, and that is to keep dark about that investment of yours until the play's on its own feet, or there will be an explosion from Sandy."

"What do you think I am?" asked Tommy, annoyed. "A complete ass?"

"I don't quite know," said Joe, smiling at him in a way that took all the sting out of the speech; "about Sandy, you know, you might be. I'm all in. Good night."

XXIV

THE TOMMY WAY

THE next morning Tommy began to put his theory into practice, and the result was that Sandy found herself surrounded by such care and attention that she marveled, even while she smiled. She soon learned that Tommy was not only a clever politician, but a very popular young man, and that to be a friend of his was to be sought after and made much of by the best and most interesting people in town.

Everywhere that Sandy went—and Tommy saw to it that she was asked everywhere—there was a watchful Tommy forming a background. A handsome and distinguished looking Tommy, with manners which Sandy could tell had been founded on Joe's, but had, like everything else Tommy did, become so distinctly Tommy's own that you never thought of them as anything but one of the many manifestations of that very vital personality.

Now did Sandy bless the devoted girls for seeing that her wardrobe was complete before she left home. She had protested against "fuss," saying: "I won't know anybody, and sha'n't want anything but a dress for the theater and one for traveling and one for rehearsals."

"You never can tell," Phyllis had wisely said,

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adding one of her own with the hem turned up and the sleeves turned down, to the heap of contributions that Nancy and Libbett had brought in and insisted on packing.

The final result was that Sandy's trunk contained all her own clothes and some of each of the sisters, and, as she confided to Mrs. Morrison, her one hope now was that her gowns would hold out, for "I do want to do Tommy credit."

Also, in order to do Tommy credit, Sandy actually tried to get sleep and food enough between performances so as not to look too fagged and tired; to remember what the girls had told her about fastening her veils properly, and just what to wear with each gown; for, though Sandy loved clothes, she hated detail. With Mrs. Morrison's aid, however, she looked, as Joe said appreciatively, "very well turned out," and yet, as he knew, but did not tell Tommy, she had spent on her entire wardrobe less than the fair Beatrice demanded for "two little gowns."

As for Joe, Sandy saw just enough of him to make her wonder that she had ever been so silly as to, once upon a time, entertain the idea that Joe had really cared about her. Joe was charming, but hard to get at; and Beatrice wasn't there, which disappointed Sandy greatly. Looking at Joe, she could not help speculating on how Beatrice must have changed to be loved by this Joe. Sandy also wondered very much how Beatrice could leave him for so long, for, though he declared himself "as usual," Sandy thought he looked rather ill.

Joe was ill. So ill that he dared not speak of it to Tommy lest that devoted friend should throw

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everything to the winds again for his sake. Sandy made it hard for Joe. She wanted so much to find the old Joe again and tell him about Will. She was sure that if once Joe guessed how much he meant to Will he would no longer shut out the brother who longed for him. It seemed as though she would never have this opportunity.

One afternoon, according to Tommy's orders, Sandy was attending a tea where the young author was being lionized, and at the same time scrutinized, by all Tommy's fair friends. With charming manners, but eyes of lynx, they tried to find out "what Mr. Wilks saw in her." Sandy, quite unconscious of this attitude—she took Tommy so for granted—proceeded, for his sake, to make herself so agreeable that they came to the conclusion that they liked her anyway; and Sandy was a great success. It was one of her greatest triumphs, had she but known it.

Tommy had promised to call for her, but the Mayor could not always detach himself entirely from the duties attending his office, so this time was compelled to beg the District Attorney to look after the Precious One for him.

When she saw Joe come in alone Sandy felt that here was her great opportunity. Accordingly, she set about making the best of it so whole-souledly and self-forgetfully that Joe for the first time wondered if he hadn't been a little mistaken in his estimate of Sandy. Now she wasn't thinking at all of the impression she was making on him; he realized that. She was just the old Sandy, simple, friendly, brusque sometimes, but sure of herself and Joe's old-friendliness. It was an agreeable sensation, and Joe surrendered himself to it. He

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walked home beside her in the dusk, listening to all the gossip of Egypt and watching Sandy's gleaming eyes and hair.

Suddenly Sandy plunged in and began to speak of Will. Joe would have stopped her at first, but quickly fell silent, and Sandy went on desperately. She knew Joe thought Will cared for nothing but money and business; so she told him how Will had felt when he, Joe, had left town. Then she gently hinted at Will's feeling for Nancy, and how it wasn't being made particularly easy for him in that quarter, because Nancy, too, had the wrong impression of Will. Wasn't he, Joe, just a little to blame for that impression? Couldn't he give Will a chance to show how much he cared? Wouldn't he, anyway, write Will? Sandy stopped and looked up into the clever, handsome face whose firm outline gleamed white against the dusk, afraid of what she might see in it; but Joe's eyes were kind this time, and his voice even kinder.

"It's all right," he assured her, smiling at her anxious face, "and thank you very much, Sandy, for telling me—and for caring so much—about Will."

"Write him, Joe," urged Sandy. "He'll be so glad to hear from you—and Beatrice," she added.

Joe smiled again and said, formally: "I'm sorry Beatrice isn't home now, Sandy. She would have liked to meet you, although generally she doesn't seem to care much for Egypt news or people."

Somehow Sandy didn't want to smile now, even while she thought how odd it was to hear Joe's voice saying this to her, and remembered how little in common she and the old Beatrice had had and

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how Beatrice had always disliked her. Of course, it might be different now that they were grown up, so she said, sincerely, "I'm sorry, too."

"I'll go home—to Will," continued Joe, slowly, "as soon as my term of office expires."

Sandy tried to put her gladness into speech. The words sounded very formal and cold to her. However, Joe seemed to understand. He stood for a moment when they parted as though he would like to say something else besides "good-by," but after the slightest hesitation merely said it again, shook her hand warmly, and went away.

Sandy went into the hotel, her cheeks burning. "I do hope," she thought, as she looked in her looking-glass, "I haven't made a little fool of myself and let Joe think I was remembering any of that—foolish old time, and that I wanted him to remember it, too."

Joe, striding down the street, was thinking: "Another minute and you'd made a fool of yourself and told that girl how short your time is and how hard it is to go. You'd only make her helplessly sorry, get Tommy all balled up, and make a mess of things. All because you want a little sympathy." He sighed, and braced his shoulders to his weary burden. "I've got to keep them both from guessing how ill I am, and I'll go home—to Will."

Just now Joe found Tommy easy to blind, owing to the great amount of work he had cut out for himself organizing the coming campaign for his successor, and the time needed for Sandy.

Meanwhile Tommy's money went quietly into the theatrical venture, and, just as Mr. Morrison had predicted, it was arranged that Sandy's play should

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open in San Francisco. Sandy's heart sank when she was told this. How could she follow it out there, and yet how could she go back home now, with its fate still undecided?

Tommy did not want Sandy to go home yet. He insisted on arguing this out with Joe.

"If I let her go back home where she'll be petted and made much of now she won't miss me as much as I want her to. I'll be just an incident, not the main squeeze."

"I don't see how you're going to prevent it," Joe said, considering him gravely.

"I don't either, but it's going to pan out differently. Wait and see," Tommy declared, determinedly.

"You're a wonder, Tommy," Joe said, indulgently; "but a woman's life can't be managed like a political campaign, you know."

"I don't see why not," retorted Tommy. "They are both subject to emotional crises and changes, aren't they—and full of surprises?"

"Oh, go on playing providence to Sandy, God bless you," laughed Joe. "It's a great game, and it certainly looks like your job."

"I hope so," said Tommy, turning an unsmiling set face to his friend; "but I'm not in the least sure of it. I can't even find out whether my tactics are getting me—next, so I'm going to consult the wisest woman I know."

Joe looked at him a moment and whistled. Then, "Mrs. Heaton?" he asked.

Tommy nodded.

"You *are* a wonder, Tommy," said Joe, appreciatively. "You deserve to win."

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"Don't, Joe." And the usually confident Tommy stammered and reached for his hat. "My only excuse is—that I want the job badly. I couldn't stand any one else—looking after Sandy."

Sandy kept Tommy waiting this afternoon; and when she came down to the reception-room Sandy looked tired and, to tell the exact truth, a little cross. She had complained vigorously to the admiring Mrs. Morrison that she was weary of teas and functions. She wanted a little rest. Life had been strenuous for the last month or so, and Sandy was feeling the strain. Moreover, Tommy had "rushed" her a little, and, being an independent young lady, Sandy was beginning to wonder whether she liked it or not. She had said to herself this morning that she was having "too much Tommy."

It was a dangerous moment; but Tommy, for all his aggressive ways, was oddly intuitive about women. One reason why most of them liked him.

He looked at Sandy now and understood. He said nothing. He let Sandy speak first.

"I'm tired, Tommy," Sandy began; "I'm terribly tired, and Tommy, I'm cross. You'd best leave me alone to-day. I'm not fit to—exhibit."

Tommy smiled at her and the fierceness with which she had jerked out the last word.

"Have I been doing that?" he asked.

Sandy's conscience smote her.

"I didn't mean to," Tommy went on, simply. "Only I can't help being proud of you, Sandy; and I have so little that—that really belongs to me, you know, that maybe I have—"

"No, you haven't, Tommy," cried Sandy, contritely. "I didn't mean it that way. But I am

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really and truly tired, and consequently I'm likely to say anything."

"Say it right out, if it relieves you any," advised Tommy, "and come along out into the fresh air. Are you all put together so you won't blow apart?" he asked, anxiously. "I've the car outside."

Sandy laughed. "I'm 'pretty substantial, thank you, and well pinned on. I'll get a heavy coat and then I think I'll do."

"Come along, then," said Tommy; "I've an extra coat for you." And he started toward the elevator.

"What is it to-day, Tommy?" asked Sandy, suspiciously, holding back. "Just a ride? Only you and me?"

Tommy grinned. "Aren't you the suspicious little cat," he said. "It's only you and me, on the way; but there's another woman at the end of the road."

Sandy felt a queer little sting of surprise, and then laughed at and to herself as she went along with him. Why, of course, just because Tommy had been kind she'd taken it for granted that there was nobody but herself. What a little fool she had been, thinking men like Joe and Tommy kept themselves alive, fed themselves as she did—on dreams.

"I'm awfully anxious to have you like her, Sandy," Tommy was saying, as he tucked her into the seat beside him, "for she's the best friend I've got. She's done a lot for me."

"Oh, Tommy," murmured a suddenly meek Sandy. "I only hope she likes me."

"Sure to," said that positive young man. "I've told her all about you, and she's keen on seeing you."

Sandy shuddered. What had Tommy said; and

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what more in the way of small-town aristocracy must she meet?

"She's just gotten home," Tommy was saying. "She was born here, you know, and keeps up the old place; but Ethel's not here much, or often. Lucky for me it happened to be one of her visiting periods when I was running for Mayor."

Sandy didn't feel at all in the mood to listen to rapturous descriptions of Tommy's lady love. It must be because she was tired. Of course that must be it. Things somehow were awfully disappointing; so little like one's expectations. Joe married, and now Tommy—engaged. Well, if it had to be, it had; and she might as well get it over and done with.

"Please, who is she, Tommy?" asked Sandy, determined to put an end to all suspense.

"Mrs. Heaton," said Tommy. "Didn't I tell you? Mrs. Ethel Heaton, the writer."

Sandy gasped. "Ethel Heaton!" she exclaimed. "The Ethel Heaton! The Bird on the Bough—The Common Tragedy—Ethel Heaton?"

"Surest thing you know." And Tommy smiled at her awe-struck tone. "The only Ethel Heaton. But her brow isn't nearly as high as her works would lead you to believe," he said, reassuringly. "She's a real person, and I'm no end fond of her."

This time Sandy had nothing to say. Ethel Heaton, of international reputation as a writer of tales, had been worshiped afar by her for years, and it was Tommy Wilks who was leading her to the beloved idol's shrine!

They had reached it now, a great long, low, old farm-house with a lovely old-fashioned garden about it. Sandy watched the car whirl through the gates



**ETHEL HEATON HERSELF CAME FORWARD TO GREET HER, SO CORDIALLY
AND SIMPLY THAT SANDY'S HEART WENT OUT TO HER**

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in a dream, and when she reached the wide door and Tommy helped her down she was still saying to herself: "Tommy—Tommy and Ethel Heaton! Oh, I wish I could tell the girls!"

The door opened, and Ethel Heaton herself came forward to greet her, so cordially and simply that Sandy's heart went out to her. Then Sandy stood back and watched Tommy and his hostess. Between these two the gray-haired writer and the young politician existed that rare and beautiful thing, a sincere friendship. Sandy saw genuine affection in Mrs. Heaton's clear eyes as they looked on Tommy; and in every word and look Tommy gave his hostess dwelt honest devotion and complete understanding.

The three went into the wide, old-fashioned living-room, and as Mrs. Heaton drew Sandy toward the open fire and began to help her remove her wraps Tommy beamed upon them both.

"This," he said, "is what I've been waiting for. I wanted to show Sandy my big sister Ethel, and show big sister—Sandy, and—you don't know how nice you look together."

The two women looked at each other and, looking, laughed so heartily that now there could be no constraint.

"Did this ridiculous boy tell you he had adopted me, and how?" asked Mrs. Heaton, watching Sandy as she patted her hair into shape.

Sandy shook her head mirthfully. "I'm learning things about Tommy," she admitted. "I thought I knew all about him"—Tommy grinned—"but he's a different Tommy every day."

Mrs. Heaton glanced with interest at the younger woman, who had been following her with such quick,

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adoring eyes. "She's genuine enough to admire my stuff whole-souledly and forget about her own," thought the older woman. "Nice girl."

Then she looked up at the broad-shouldered Tommy, who was still regarding them both with an air of pleased ownership.

"Take yourself off, Tommy. I know you are busy, and you may call for Miss Sandison after dinner and take her to the theater. I suppose you have to go every night as yet?" she asked, turning to Sandy.

Sandy said, "Yes, there are still changes to be made and watched," and had begun to protest against staying on, when the elder woman laid her long, delicate hand on Sandy's arm.

"Please, my dear," she said. "We have so little time to get acquainted, and I want it so much. You will, won't you?"

Sandy, completely under her charm, said simply that she didn't want to appropriate so much of Mrs. Heaton's time.

"But it's all yours," Mrs. Heaton assured her. "Tommy and I saved it for you, and if Tommy gets through his business in time he may come back and dine with us."

Sandy protested no longer, and when Tommy had gone and the gray car was simply a little speck on the broad road, Mrs. Heaton said:

"That's one of the nicest young men I know. You are fortunate to have such a friend."

"Tommy's always been my friend," said Sandy. "I'm afraid I take Tommy for granted."

Mrs. Heaton gave her a keen look. "It isn't always safe to do that. I did, and do you want to know what happened?"

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Then she told Sandy the story of her acquaintance with Tommy. How she, on one of her annual visits home, had been taken by some of the women interested in the town's welfare to hear the young candidate for Mayor speak. She had liked Tommy at once, and she had—and here she laughed outright as she saw Sandy's eyes—written some of his campaign literature.

"You!" exclaimed Sandy. "You!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Heaton. "It came about in the most thoroughly characteristic Tommy way. He was introduced to me. I said the usual things about hoping he would succeed and wishing I could help the cause along. Tommy's unusual. He took me to mean what I said. I can hear him now and see again the eyes of the other women widen, as yours did. 'Sure you can help us,' he said. 'You write, don't you? Well, if you really mean it, why not help me with some hot campaign stuff?'"

"He came up here that very night and showed me how to do it, and together we turned out some very 'hot stuff' indeed. I'm proud of it. We certainly left the other side gasping in the rear. Tommy gave me something to be interested in, something alive to think of, just when I needed it. I'm a very lonely woman, my dear, and my daughter, the only human being really belonging to me in all this wide world, had left me—and the world—that spring. I was thankful—to Tommy."

Sandy reached out her hand without speaking, and Ethel Heaton took it and kept it, and with it Sandy's heart for all time.

After a little Mrs. Heaton told Sandy more, much

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more, about Tommy. He had not opened his heart to his Wise Woman for nothing.

"He's quite by himself," she said. "I've met lots of young men agreeable and brilliant, too, but very few Tommys. I like him better and better the more I know of him; possibly one reason is because I find he regards me quite simply as Mrs. Heaton. It isn't that he doesn't know my books. He's read every one of them; but, as he told me afterward, when we got to know each other well, 'They're all right; but I want to know what you are like.'

"He's done a lot for other young men here, too," she added, thoughtfully; "that brilliant young Drayton, for instance, who has the fat, blonde wife who is always imagining herself ill. It's her only means of keeping her husband's attention centered on her. Tommy's been wonderful with him, as you would know if you had seen them both when they first came to town."

"I know Joe—well," said Sandy, briefly, wondering in her heart how much Mrs. Heaton knew.

Later Mrs. Heaton returned to the subject. "Tommy's been good for all the young people in town, and he's a great favorite with them. Yet, I suppose, I am really his greatest friend here. It isn't because Tommy hasn't plenty of feminine society. Oh, dear me, no! There are many girls in town and out of it who are proud of knowing Tommy Wilks. It was simply that he seemed to want me; and yet the boy was diffident about taking up my time unless he came with a "good excuse," like campaign literature. Finally I told him I felt like a mother toward him, that he had best

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look on me in that light, and come whenever he wanted advice or a scolding. He refused me on those terms," she said, smiling up at Sandy. "He said that his own mother had been so wonderful he couldn't think of any one else in just that way; but he'd never had a sister and always wanted one. If I'd let him think of me as a nice, big sister he'd love it. Of course, I agreed. That's the history of our friendship—Tommy's and mine. I value that friendship highly."

Sandy was so busy reconstructing Tommy, and calling herself a little snob for having to do it, that she had little to say; but when Tommy came to dine Sandy looked at him with new eyes.

Mrs. Heaton went to the theater with them and watched Sandy's play, and said nice things about it and the book, which she had actually read, so that Sandy went to bed that night utterly happy.

Tommy took Mrs. Heaton home and listened to how much she liked Sandy, and laid bare to her his inmost hopes and fears.

"I don't want her to go back to Egypt yet," he concluded. "If she does she won't miss me enough, and I want her to miss me—hard."

"Aren't you taking a risk going back there, anyway?" asked Mrs. Heaton, thoughtfully.

"Socially, you mean?" questioned the keen Tommy.

Mrs. Heaton nodded, watching him with wise eyes.

"I'll be just 'that Tommy Wilks' there, no matter what I've done or been, if that's what you mean?" he said. "But it will be good discipline for me." Then, as though answering her unspoken thought, he continued: "Sandy won't care. She isn't that

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kind of a snob. Sometimes Sandy's just the least bit inclined to be 'intellectually snobbish,' but that's all."

Mrs. Heaton said nothing more to Tommy; but she called for Sandy herself the next day, and they took a long drive together. After she got back Sandy sent a night letter to the girls at home, packed her trunk, and Tommy took it and her to Mrs. Heaton's.

On the way Sandy told Tommy how Mrs. Heaton had explained that she was going out to the old Mission country to live on a ranch and rest and write her next book. She didn't want to go alone. Also, she had been asked to do a series of articles on the Mission Indians at a fabulous sum for a prominent magazine. This Mrs. Heaton declared she would have to decline utterly unless Sandy would come and do it under Mrs. Heaton's supervision. If she would, Mrs. Heaton would get the editor's consent; and, while the price for Sandy's work would not be extraordinary, it would be more than enough to cover Sandy's expenses. Sandy could see the country, finish her own belated book betweenwhiles, and run up to San Francisco and see how the play got on.

In this way Mrs. Heaton would have Sandy's companionship each day when they had both finished toiling. It would be so much better than taking some one with her who had nothing to do and would be constantly on her mind. She liked Sandy. Wouldn't Sandy come? She would be absolutely independent.

Sandy, who knew how many people would have jumped at the chance, stood looking at Mrs. Heaton

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in frank amazement, and then said, in a very meek voice for Sandy: "I'm not always easy to get along with. Are you sure you would be able to stand me?"

Mrs. Heaton put her arms about the girl and laughed. "My dear, I'm a frightfully difficult person myself at times. Shall we try the experiment?"

"I always ask the family first about everything," the delighted Sandy had told her; hence the night letter.

The reply was quick and cordial, for, though they hated to lose their Sandy for so long a time, the girls rejoiced at her chance to see the country and to have a good time. "Sandy's worked pretty hard," they agreed, "and she ought to have some fun."

Tommy's joy, Mrs. Heaton assured him, would have been ample reward if it had been a disagreeable task she had undertaken for his sake, instead of something she wanted to do for herself. "For I like your Sandy immensely," she told him again.

"It solves my problem beautifully," said Tommy, with a sigh of deep content. "Joe wants to get out of here, and so do I, very soon. We'll leave this town in good shape and good hands, and it's always been my plan to go back and lighten my native Egyptian darkness. I don't want Sandy there until I've made a beginning at the straightening out. This will give me nearly six months clear."

Then he looked at her shyly and hesitated. "You'll look after Sandy for me, I know, and I don't want to be a dog in the manger; but I do want her to miss me."

"If I know anything about it, Tommy," replied Mrs. Heaton, "she will."

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"Sandy's pretty difficult to judge," Tommy sighed. "She's always popular."

"She's going out with me to work," Mrs. Heaton reminded him, "and I'll see that she doesn't have time for much else."

"Sandy 'll work," said Tommy, still uncomfortable. "That's only another of the things I'm up against. Sandy's awfully ambitious."

Mrs. Heaton, who, of course, being a sister-woman, didn't find Sandy the unique and baffling personage she seemed to Tommy, looked at him a little impatiently, started to say something, and then stopped. "You'll have to let her find out just how much it's all worth, Tommy," she finally said. "That's the only cure."

Tommy drew very little satisfaction from this remark, and, after some two weeks more of his carefully conducted campaign, was still dubious.

The day of their departure for California, having himself taken them to the station, he returned to the apartment so downcast that Joe, after one glance at him, advised him to wind up his affairs and start for Egypt at once. "Try something new, Tommy," he cynically concluded. "You're not a particle of good or use here as you are."

"I know it," groaned the stricken Tommy. "It was all right before I'd seen her; but now that I have, it's awful. She parted from me without turning a hair, tickled to death to get away and see the country; and here I'll lie awake nights thinking of all the things that can happen to one lone little red-head with no one to look after her—"

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"Oh, shut up, Tommy!" snarled Joe. "Sandy's always being looked after by somebody."

"But not properly," objected Tommy; "not as I—"

"You're absolutely and completely impossible," declared Joe. "I'm going to write to Will."

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AT home, meanwhile, the sisters pored over Sandy's letters; and Will Drayton haunted the house for the latest news of Joe. It was not until Georgie noticed that Will came only when Nancy was at home that his suspicions were aroused.

Once more he complained loudly to Mrs. Mac, and once more was entreated to "haud yer tongue, laddie." "It's a God's mercy," she added, complacently, "that Nancy's getting a chance to mak' sae guid a match—wi' plenty o' siller, too. Jist when I was thinking she'd soon be on the shelf-like, if she didnae have a care."

Failing to find comfort in Mrs. Mac, Georgie joined Phyllis and sat beside her on the piazza, casting about for a propitious moment to open his whole mind to her. Phylly wasn't always satisfactory nowadays. There was always that confounded Doctor Morland in the background. She was waiting for him now, Georgie knew, and he sighed again at his hard lot.

"What do you think of Leonard?" he asked Phyllis, suddenly, as she was craning her neck to see the Doctor's gig as soon as it reached the bend.

"I like him well enough," said Phyllis. "Why?"
Georgie impatiently moved his head out of reach.

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Phyllis would stroke his curls whether he wanted to be stroked or not. "I don't understand his little game," he declared.

"What do you mean?" asked Phyllis, ceasing the stroking and gazing expressively at her brother.

"Don't trouble making goo-goo eyes at me, Phylly. I'm pretty well bothered this afternoon. My invention, my last one, isn't working out very well, and I don't know what to make of this Leonard business." He shook his head gravely and sighed.

"Well?" demanded Phyllis.

"Oh, pretend you haven't noticed it!" fumed Geordie. "I tell you, it worries me. You may be so wrapped up in your own affairs that you can't see anything that isn't shoved right under your nose; but I'm not, and there's Nancy to be considered.

"Oh!" ejaculated Phyllis, staring at him in a half-frightened, half-fascinated way. The idea of Geordie noticing those things! "Is that what you mean? Well, there—there never was any real—any engagement or anything like that between Leonard and Nancy, so I don't see what—"

"Oh yes, you do," retorted Geordie. "As a matter of fact, any way you look at it it's a worry to me. Leonard's all right and a fine fellow, but he spends all his spare time following Libbett about; and while she's reading and playing and singing to him continually Nancy's going to that old magazine office every day, probably serenely thinking he's her property. I tell you, it's an awful thing to have so many sisters. When my heart isn't wrung for the fellows they're fooling it's wrung for fear some fellow 'll fool them." Phyllis laughed, but Geordie

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went on doggedly in earnest. "I can't have Nancy's heart broken; and I can't have Libbett do a mean trick like that, even if she doesn't realize it. I wonder if I ought to speak to her?"

"Don't you dare!" said Phyllis, grasping him by the shoulders and shaking him fiercely. "You keep right out of this affair, Geordie!"

"All very well for you," grumbled Geordie; "your hash is settled, but—"

Phyllis leaned toward him mysteriously. "What about Will Drayton?"

"That's just it," complained Geordie. "What the deuce is he butting in for?"

Phyllis didn't answer, for at that moment, catching sight of the brown mare, she went flying down the path to meet the Doctor.

Geordie watched Phyllis climb in and the Doctor turn the mare and go off toward the town; then, whistling disconsolately, he went into the barn to work on the baffling latest invention. He had very little time now, having secured extra work reporting the local news of Egypt and surrounding villages for one of the city papers.

He was working hard. His inherited journalistic temperament gave him and his sisters little rest. The sisters really hated to have Geordie work so hard. In their opinion his studies were enough; but as he equally hated being supported by what he had called, in the heat of argument, a "pack of petticoats," they had even to let him take his own way.

He felt very old and cynical and worldly wise, and would have felt even more so if he could have known how near he had come to the truth as to Libbett's innocence of Leonard's feeling—and her own.

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It was a pair of lovers who were down there under the shade of the big beech-trees, though one of them was wholly ignorant of the fact.

Nancy came along the wood road that afternoon, for the magazine had gone to press early. Nancy was singing softly to herself and thinking with amusement of all Libbett's little tricks to soften Mr. Martin toward Leonard: how Libbett always left the magazine with Leonard's latest illustrations open on Mr. Martin's desk; how she always included every art exhibition which might mention his name, when she read the newspaper aloud to his uncle. There were a thousand little "Libbety" ways in which she tried to draw the two together, and which Mr. Martin always pretended not to notice.

The road joined their own brook path, and as she came round the bend she saw Libbett and Leonard.

Libbett was reading aloud from one of Leonard's favorite books, and Leonard was looking at Libbett.

They had not seen Nancy yet. Nancy was glad of that, for she had seen the look in Leonard's eyes as he sat idly watching the sunlight flickering on Libbett's dark hair. There was no mistaking that look. It needed time to get used to the fact that Leonard felt that way about her little sister Libbett.

Just then Leonard laughed aloud and leaned over Libbett's shoulder to point out his objections to the poet's reasoning. Under cover of their laughing discussion Nancy retraced her steps to the bend unseen and took the short cut home.

Not for worlds would she have surprised them. Leonard might have guessed from her face what she had read in his eyes.

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Good heavens, how could she have been so blind! The queer thing was, Why didn't she care—more?

She was still pondering these things in her heart as she sat at the head of the table that night, happy that Mrs. Mac had taken it into her head to surpass herself in the matter of dinner, since Will Drayton had come up early to talk magazine and Joe, and stayed.

Nancy watched Libbett and Leonard, thinking that no one else knew what she had just found out; also that her own efforts to keep from being left alone with Will Drayton were wholly unnoticed.

They had been instantly seen through by the astute Phyllis and the sympathetic Mrs. Mac; but, while Phyllis would have made it easier for the pursued, Mrs. Mac was wholly on the side of the pursuer.

Between the two even Nancy's clever doubling might have been wholly unsuccessful had it not been for the advent of Tommy.

He descended upon them out of the blue, it seemed, though it was really from the village hack; and without further warning than a "Hullo Will! We were told you might be here. Joe's at the house waiting-for you."

"How's Sandy?" came in a chorus from her anxious family.

"Sandy's having the time of her young life with Mrs. Heaton," said Tommy, beaming on them. "Going to stay there until the play comes to New York. It's doing well now. Joe and I couldn't wait any longer—and here we are."

There was the least little silence as they all considered the returned Tommy. "Mayor Tommy"

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they had called him in gleeful derision on receiving Sandy's enthusiastic letters.

Somehow it didn't seem such a joke when you saw Tommy. On the contrary, that you should ever have dismissed him as "just Tommy Wilks" seemed more of a joke—on you, when you looked at the broad-shouldered, capable man with the clear eye and what Nancy rather impatiently called "the conqueror's air."

His next words, however, set them all thinking about Joe.

"I ordered him into the house and into bed," he was saying in answer to Will's hurried question. "He's rather done up with the journey. Joe—Joe's not strong, you know."

A quick look of anxiety crossed Will's face. If Joe had been neglecting his health there was cause for alarm.

"Be all right in the morning, I think," Tommy said.

"Is—is his wife with him?" Will asked, conscious that the girls were eagerly waiting the answer. They had all been speculating about Joe's marriage to Beatrice since Sandy's letters had announced that the old rumor was a fact.

"Beatrice?" questioned Tommy; then, dryly: "Beatrice is at Palm Beach. She was too tired to take the hard journey here without a stop-over and rest of some kind. Beatrice tires very easily," he said, with a keen glance at Will.

"I see," said Will.

"Not very clearly," said a voice close at his elbow, "or you would have known that I wouldn't let Tommy pack me to bed. I'm here at last, old man. How are you all?"

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Will turned to be confronted by Joe, who had stolen upon them in the dusk. Joe caught both Will's hands and crushed them in his just in time to prevent Will from behaving most "un-American."

At least that was Geordie's opinion, confided to Nancy some days later.

"For Will looked," said Geordie, glancing up from his work-bench with a disgusted air, "as though he was going to—kiss Joe."

"Well, I don't wonder," said Nancy, who had sought out Geordie in his workshop, fearing he felt neglected. "He hasn't seen Joe for years, and somehow that night Joe—well, Joe looked like a nice, lovable, naughty small boy."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Geordie, laying down his tools. "Women are queer. He looked like a pretty tall, thin man to me; and if Will had—what I said—it would have been sickening."

"It is done, you know," said Nancy, casually.

"Only foreigners," said Geordie, dismissing the subject hastily, lest Nancy should by any chance uphold so horrible a custom.

But Nancy was thinking how much more "human" Will had seemed since Joe's return, and wondering if—

Geordie roused her from her thoughts by remarking: "Gee! Tommy blew him up, though, didn't he? Joe took it, too, as meek. Funny how all you girls except Sandy never had any use for Tommy Wilks. He's something now."

"Yes," admitted Nancy, thoughtfully. "I can't help admiring him. He's a power."

"Travels all round with the old crowd," continued Geordie, enthusiastically; "not a bit ashamed of old times or friends."

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"That's another reason why I admire him," said Nancy.

"And Joe," Geordie went on, enjoying to the full this chance to talk things over with Nancy, "married to that bleating sheep, Beatrice." He paused. "I've seen her. She came yesterday. She's fat—"

Nancy rose. She, too, had met Beatrice, and she did not want to discuss her with Geordie until she had mastered her own sense of irritation.

"Don't go," begged Geordie, looking at her so pleadingly that Nancy felt suddenly very sorry for him and sat down again beside him on the workbench. She knew that Geordie was missing Georgina, who was still abroad, terribly—Georgina, who could always joke and laugh and always had time to play with him.

"Thank Heaven, Sandy seems unattached yet," Geordie blurted out. "Gee! I'd be glad to see her back and have one sister all to myself, even though Sandy and I do generally scrap a little."

"I haven't left you, Geordie," Nancy said, administering a few gentle pats to his shoulder and rumpling his hair a little. Geordie responded by rubbing his curly head softly against her arm, always a sign that he would not rudely repel a little petting.

"But that old woman's magazine," he began.

"Oh, Geordie! my magazine is not for old women exclusively," Nancy said, laughing.

"It takes all your time," growled Geordie, still disconsolate, "and lately, when you haven't been at the office, you've been over at Drayton's coddling that Joe—"

"Don't be jealous of poor Joe," begged Nancy, in a low voice.

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Geordie thought a moment, then he said slowly: "Isn't there any chance for him—Joe, I mean, Nancy?"

Nancy shook her head. "The specialists say not. Joe didn't want to bother with them. He knew. But he let Will call them all in so that Will would feel he had done all he could."

"Why doesn't Joe go—where it's warmer and better for him—down South?" asked Geordie, gruffly, awed at the thought of this nearness of life's great shadow.

"It's too late for that to make any difference," Nancy answered. "Even so, Will wanted to do it; but Joe begged him, if he really wished to make him happy, to let him stay at home."

"Poor old Will," Geordie commented, rising and knocking down several small tools and taking a long time to pick them up. "I'm glad he's got you to be fond of."

"Geordie!" gasped Nancy. She started to say something, suddenly grew very red and embarrassed, and left the workshop.

Whether Geordie's frank statement had anything to do with opening her eyes to the truth about her own feelings, or whether the daily spectacle of Will's utterly self-forgetful love for his brother and his unwearied kindness and patience with that brother's utterly selfish wife, broke down the barriers she had erected between them, Nancy never quite knew. Only, as daily Will's need of her love grew greater, her love grew to meet the need; and, though Will and Nancy seemed quite unconscious, and as yet Will dared not speak, others were beginning to see, and no one, not even Mrs. Mac, was as pleased as Joe.

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Nancy, who had never before understood Will's devotion, or Sandy's intense admiration for this black-haired disturber of their peace, fell completely under the spell of Joe's charm. All the time he would permit her to give him she devoted to serving him.

Life was sweet to Nancy, and the desire to live strong; and her admiration rose to white heat as she watched him unflinchingly and uncomplainingly facing a complete withdrawal from the game he loved. For Joe was young, and life held much for him.

She was thinking of this as she sat beside him on one of his "bad" afternoons. Nancy had been reading poetry to him. "Soothing-syrup," Joe called it, being too weary for prose. In the pause that followed the end of the last poem Micky's splendid voice rang across the wide lawn. Micky was seldom far from Joe these days; and Libbett had walked over with Nancy to Drayton's; so together they were making sweet music.

"When I am dying lean over me," sang Micky.

Joe turned impatiently on his pillows and gazed up at the blue sky above him. "What rot!" he commented, sarcastically, repeating it. "Last thing a dying man wants is any one hanging over him and cutting off his supply of fresh air."

Even as he said it Nancy, as she stooped to replace the heavy steamer rug which had slipped from his couch, thought swiftly: "Who is it he wants? He does want—some one."

Joe smiled up into her shrinking face. "Now that old Japanese beggar you were reading from—forget his name—he knew what he was talking about.

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'All else have I forgotten, e'en forgotten to forget,'" Joe quoted. "That's more like a dying man. Bet the other fellow was a woman."

"I thought you admired women—and their works?" said Nancy, stung as always by that particular tone of Joe's voice, but really anxious to get his thoughts away from the melancholy train started by the song.

"I love women," Joe corrected, with a quizzical look at Nancy, knowing full well how it irritated her. "Love, not admire."

"I'll read you some of Sandy's latest screed," said Nancy, picking up Sandy's letter hastily, in order that she might have a screen between her and the impish eyes that seemed to read her thoughts and reject her pity.

As she began it flashed across her mind that Joe seldom mentioned Sandy's name. Maybe he wasn't as interested in the news as she had thought. He listened eagerly enough as Nancy read what Sandy wrote about the play's success and her life on the ranch with Mrs. Heaton.

"She'll have the biggest triumph of the season if it makes good," he murmured, his eyes gleaming. "But I—I won't be here to see it—or her," he added, softly.

But Nancy heard; and Joe, looking at her, knew that she had guessed more than he had meant she should.

He closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them, and said quietly: "Yes, I'd like to see Sandy—once more; and for that very reason I'm going to ask you to promise me that Sandy is not told that—or harrowed up with reports of my failing

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health by you or Tommy. Tommy would urge her to come back—in time; and she would do it. That's the kind of friends those two are—to me. It would, as you know, simply play the deuce—with the artistic temperament."

Nancy, her heart aching for him, promised to do what he asked. He thanked her, and then, looking straight before him, said: "I tell you because you're plucky and can stand it better than Will or Tommy—but it's apt to come any minute now. My heart, you know. It's badly strained. I'm not—too sorry, and, remember, I leave Will—to you."

Impulsively Nancy knelt beside him. "Joe," she murmured, "isn't there anything I can do for you?"

Joe opened his eyes and smiled at her. "Yes," he said, "get up. You'll spoil your gown. And ask Mick to sing—something soothing."

As she turned he said softly: "Don't worry about me, Nance. I'm getting more than I deserve. I threw away my life—with both hands, and God lets me—die at home."

XXVI

THE TOWN AND TOMMY

ALL Egypt had been startled and excited over "old Wilks' boy, Tommy."

Even the return of Joe Drayton faded into insignificance in the face of Tommy's revolutionary effect on his town and townspeople.

For Tommy had begun at once to play what he called "the game," and Egypt was stirred to its political and social depths. Tommy had interfered with Egypt's time-worn traditions, and yet, O wonder-working fact, he had "money of his own" and needn't "go into politics for a living."

Egypt didn't quite know what Tommy was after; therefore Tommy had its undivided attention, and he forged ahead from the moment he landed on his native heath; and Joe Drayton, in spite of bodily weakness, helped him.

In the first place, Old Egypt House took on a new and surprising aspect. Tommy bought it, and, though Egypt shook its head and openly gaped at the outlay, Tommy was careful to point out to the business men that Egypt was right on the line of the best motor roads between New York and Philadelphia, and that it was therefore an excellent investment. Egypt ceased to lament openly at the reckless expenditure of money, and went about with

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praise for "that young fellow Wilks," and the "fine ideas" he'd gathered up somewhere out West.

Thus did Old Egypt House lose its undesirable country-saloon look and become a modern inn of the best type. There was a pleasant dining-room, and the town no longer felt called upon to apologize for dropping in there. Afternoon teas, luncheons, and dinners, cooked simply but well, at Old Egypt House became the fashion.

The disreputable "Old Egypt Hall" at the top of the building was remodeled into an entertainment hall, spacious, well-lighted, with plenty of exits and fresh air. Old Egypt House was an ornament, not an eyesore, to the town now.

"That's one thing done," said Tommy.

That "back room" had disappeared utterly as a general meeting-place for the idle and the young. To take its place Tommy set on foot another and greater change. Egypt was to have a public library. In connection with the library there were to be recreation-grounds, and club-rooms—one for boys, one for girls.

As the library was to be for the town and of the town, the townspeople were roused, enlisted, and made to feel that it was really public, and that they, themselves, were to give it to the town; but the subscriptions were started, and started generously, by William and Joseph Drayton. The recreation-grounds and club-rooms, moreover, were a free gift to the town from Joseph Drayton and Thomas Wilks.

"It's the best way I know of to strike at the young corner loafers, Joe," Tommy had said. "No more back rooms and no more idle boys with nowhere to

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go but the street corners, as it was when we were growing up."

"It's only the beginning," he added. "Wait till I'm Mayor of Egypt."

Joe laughed, and helped.

Likewise did all the Sandison family.

On Joe's "good" nights the two men would sit in the old Meadowbanks sitting-room talking over their schemes with the girls, with Leonard, Will, and Micky, who had not yet gone South, and would not while Joe wanted him, listening and advising.

Once in a while Tommy would stop and throw back his head and look about him, and catch Joe's eyes, too, wandering restlessly about the room. They both felt that Sandy ought to be there. Egypt wasn't Egypt without Sandy.

Sandy was deeply interested in all she heard of their plans, and wrote that if the play made a great success in New York she, too, was going to do something for Egypt. It was a great secret—but she would start the hospital.

The girls knew it had been Sandy's pet scheme always. Egypt, with all its growing factory population, was three miles from the nearest emergency hospital and seven from the nearest city hospital.

"As though we'd forgotten that," said Tommy, smiling and frowning over her letter. "I know why she wants it," he said to himself, and his quick mind traveled back to the day of the fire and the Chief.

Sandy was very busy and very happy, and had finished her book and the articles, and was thoroughly enjoying herself. Tommy would have been flattered if he had known how she longed to be in the Egyptian campaign and how much she missed

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him. She felt eager and restless, and longed to go East again; and Mrs. Heaton, who thought this was a good sign, delayed their coming.

When they were alone Tommy spoke to Joe again of her letter. "All the same," he concluded, "that girl isn't going to use her own money, if she makes any, for the hospital. That's public business, and I mean to educate Egypt up to attending to its public business. Only give me time enough—"

"Time," said Joe, leaning back against his pillows and looking up at the athletic Tommy. "You'll have plenty of time, Tom, to do all you want to do. Tell me now what you are after, what you mean to do."

"Make Egypt over," answered Tommy, modestly, "into a decent, self-respecting little town; then I'm going to Trenton and help make over my native state; and then I'm going to Washington and help make over my native country."

"Modest and retiring man," laughed Joe. "I believe you will."

"Meantime," said Tommy, determinedly, "I'm going to get you up and about and into the thick of the fight."

"Ah," murmured Joe, closing his eyes, for it was one of his "bad" days, "that's one thing, Tommy, I believe you—can't do."

"Then the fun's all gone out of everything," said Tommy.

And there was something in his voice that made Joe open his eyes quickly, and surprise in Tommy's the look that David's had for Jonathan. A love that had swallowed up jealousy and all the smaller things that creep into friendship to destroy it.

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"Why, Tommy, you old fool!" said Joe. "I believe you—care."

"Don't—" begged Tommy.

They were still for a moment, thinking of all the things they never could say to each other and all the things they had shared together. Curiously enough, Joe broke the silence with a question.

"What's wrong with Leonard?" he asked Tommy.

Tommy started and then grinned. "Libbett," he said.

Joe smiled. "I don't mean that; that would be the best thing that ever happened to Len, if it comes off. You can't tell about shy birds like Libbett."

"That kind of girl," Tommy said, firmly, "is the most difficult to guess at. She's the most demure little, stubborn, exasperating feminine thing I ever met. Just when we're busy marrying her off to some nice fellow she may think she wants a career."

Joe laughed again. "Well, you can't bully her into marrying, you know, Tommy. Libbett isn't a problem in political economy."

"She's worse," groaned Tommy, "if she won't take Leonard. Joe, I almost think it was a mistake to come back here to Egypt. Out there in the West I didn't care a hang about any one but you; and here I get my feelings involved continually, and it mixes me up."

"You're very funny when you're mixed, Tom," Joe said; "but that doesn't help me with Leonard. Something's simply eating into the chap."

Tommy looked grave. "You're a wonder for spying out trouble, Joe. Len told me a little about it. It's his eyes."

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"Find out all you can," Joe advised. "If money will help we may be able to help him."

"Sure," agreed Tommy, rising hastily. "Here's Beatrice. She can't bear the sight of me. I'll slope."

Beatrice, home again once more, was finding Egypt quite as boring as the little Western town she had fled. For a little while it had been fun to revisit the old place and astonish the town with her clothes; but by and by even that amusement tired her, and Joe was so ill. It was always a bore to be in the house with an invalid. Beatrice much preferred to be the only delicate one on the premises, and so presently announced that she must try an up-state fashionable sanitarium for a "rest cure." She laughed at Will's grave face and anxious air, and repeated to him her stock phrase, in which she had really come to believe herself by dint of much repetition: "Joe had often been quite as bad as he is now, and then picked right up again."

To-morrow Beatrice was to set forth, and great but secret were the rejoicings of Joe's friends, for she either did not see or would not believe the seriousness of Joe's case; consequently the invalid exerted himself beyond his strength to prove that she was quite right and that there was no occasion for anxiety.

Meanwhile Tommy, the resolute and energetic, turned his mind to Leonard's affairs, and his steps toward Meadowbanks.

According to Tommy's reasoning, if there was anything wrong with Leonard, Libbett ought to know, and, as there was no more direct means of finding out if she did know than by asking her, he concluded that the best and kindest thing was to ask.

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So he asked Libbett if Leonard's eyes had been giving him more trouble lately.

"Leonard's eyes?" questioned Libbett. Then Tommy knew that Leonard had not told her.

Very stupid of him, Tommy concluded, for if the girl didn't know how things were, how could she know her own mind? Tommy proceeded to tell her that Leonard's eyes had been troubling him a little lately, and he had gone to see a specialist.

As Tommy saw the distress in Libbett's face he heard Leonard's voice in the hall and concluded that he had done as much as he could in that particular direction.

Libbett started up and hurried toward the door; and Tommy quietly swung himself through one of the long French windows to the ground and walked rapidly toward the Martin place.

"Since I've mixed things up this much," Tommy argued, "I may as well have a shot at the old man."

Meantime Libbett, without another thought of Tommy, had stood watching Leonard as he entered the room, noting anew how worn and tired he looked; and as she looked the wall she had been vainly trying to build within her—to keep Leonard out—crumpled up.

She came toward him, her hands outstretched. "Leonard," she said, softly, her own eyes shining wells of pity, "you must tell me—I must know—just how—bad it—is."

Leonard caught her hands in his. He never stopped to ask how she knew. "I saw the specialist yesterday. He thinks—I've come to him—just in time. There's a good chance I won't—won't—lose my sight."

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Libbett clung to his hands desperately without speaking.

Leonard bent his tall head toward the little dark one that was turned from him so that he might not see her sudden tears.

"He advises me to go to Germany with him when he crosses in the spring, that we may consult together one of the greatest authorities there. It means a year's idleness, anyway; but if I go with him it may mean complete, not merely partial recovery. So I—"

"Oh, my poor boy, I can't bear it!" Libbett began, maternally, she thought, and found herself finishing the sentence with her face smothered against a blue-serge coat, and Leonard saying incoherent things of a highly agreeable nature in her ear.

Petrified with astonishment—at least that was how she excused it to herself afterward—she stayed right where she was until her thoughts grew clearer. She then demanded in a very small voice indeed to be put down so that her feet might at least touch the floor, and when this modest request wasn't instantly complied with, further urged, vehemently but softly, that she "couldn't breathe."

Alarmed, Leonard sat her gently down on the old green sofa, so stylishly covered with denim years ago that it had never been recovered since. Instead of apologizing for interfering with a young person's breathing he said he couldn't help it.

It seemed a straightforward and truthful statement to Libbett, and she forgave him at once on account of his eyes; but Leonard didn't seem conscious that he was behaving in any way unusually. He "scrunched," as Libbett described it to herself,

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her right up in his arms again and began to pour out a mass of endearments and explanations which seemed to have been weighing on his mind for some time. They would have conveyed nothing to any one else, but Libbett found them wondrously clear.

She understood perfectly how he had been planning and saving in order to be able to ask her to share his life with him; how he had not dared to think of life without Libbett a part of it, yet feared to interfere with her career.

"Pooh!" said Libbett, the ambitious one. "What's a career! Just as though I wouldn't sing better with you around than if I were crying my eyes out because you were not there."

This logic was at once so conclusive, attractive, and appealing to Leonard that he paused to tell her so, and then with a burst of despair remembered that this trouble with his eyes would take almost all his money and create such an uncertainty as to his future that he must not ask her to share it.

"I don't see how you can avoid it now," calmly remarked Libbett. "If you haven't asked me to marry you, and we are not engaged this minute, then it's perfectly disgraceful for you to be scrunching me up so close, and I shall have to call Mrs. Mac. Unless we are engaged."

"We are engaged," said Leonard, firmly, still scrunching; "but, my dear little girl, do you understand what I'm letting you in for? A poor man, who makes his living with his eyes, and whose eyes have gone back on him."

"I don't care to be gloomed up at the very beginning of my engagement," Libbett replied, coldly,

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"nor to have my young man criticized so severely, even by you. Let me describe him: He's a very tall, good-looking person when his hair is tidy." Libbett proceeded to remedy that defect. "He's awfully clever, and he's been working too hard, so his eyes hurt him; but he's going abroad to have them looked after properly. He's not going to get blue or discouraged about it, though, for he knows that there's a girl here singing and working hard, and thinking just of him and no one else. So, you see, he's got to be well and cheerful and give his eyes every chance—for her sake."

One hand stole softly up and closed Leonard's eyes, and stayed there, holding them shut, so that he might not see her face.

"He's to remember this always," the soft voice went on, "that if the girl didn't believe he had every chance she wouldn't wait. She'd go with him now and throw everything else to the winds. No matter what happened."

There was a very long interval before they went out to announce their wonderful news to Mrs. Mac and the family.

Mrs. Mac, who loved Leonard as her own, declared herself as "pleased as Punch," but scouted the idea that she was surprised.

"No me," she said. "I've been thinking it was this way a long whiley back. But Losh! I'm that glad it's turnt oot this wey I dinna ken what to mak' for supper."

Everybody was sympathetic except Geordie, who held that Leonard should have asked his permission first. Libbett was useful to him. He didn't see just how he was going to be able to do without her. His

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one comfort seemed to be that it looked like a long engagement.

Soft-hearted Libbett petted Geordie repentantly, and solemnly assured him that her engagement would not make any difference. Geordie called aloud on the credulous marines to hear her. He knew better. Still even Geordie was not surprised.

"You all ought to have been surprised," Libbett insisted. "I was. Anyway, I know one person who will be."

"Who's that?" asked Leonard, looking at her with what Geordie described as a "sickening air of proprietorship."

"Uncle Martin," answered Libbett, happily. "Wait till I tell him I'm to be his real niece."

Tommy, having descended upon the bewildered Mr. Martin with his usual energy, first enchanted the old banker with a sketch of the future growth of Egypt and its banking business, and then, by swift but natural stages led up to Leonard, his eyes, and Libbett. Mr. Martin sat rigid, without a word, when Tommy had finished saying all he meant to say.

Judging that all the good or harm he could do had now been done, Tommy rose to go. "I'll go with you as far as Meadowbanks," said Mr. Martin, as Tommy took up his hat.

Tommy made no comment, and said very little on the way down except a word or two of discreet praise for Leonard and unlimited admiration for Libbett, in which latter the old banker joined him heartily.

All the way down Mr. Martin had been busy formulating in his mind a set speech, gracious, but

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not too gracious, a little severe, and yet just, with which he would apprise Leonard that the past was the past.

Yet, when the still somewhat anxious Tommy opened the sitting-room door and ushered into the family circle the unexpected guest, all that Mr. Martin said was: "Len, my dear boy—" And as by that time both Libbett's arms were tight about his neck, the speech was never delivered, and somehow didn't seem necessary.

Tommy went home all by himself that night. For the first time in years Leonard was to sleep in his old room at his uncle's house. Tommy looked in, as usual, to see how Joe was, reporting all that had occurred.

Joe listened, and then turned to him. "Tommy, you blundering idiot," he said, "how did you dare? Don't you know you might have queered the whole thing?"

"I know it," answered Tommy; "but I didn't." Then he stretched himself and looked hungrily around.

"I wish to God I had more to do," he said, fervently. "Egypt, or something's, getting on my nerves."

Joe smiled. "It's the town," he said. "I feel it, too," he assured him. "It's full of—memories, and you miss your old occupation."

"What's that?" asked Tommy.

"Looking after Sandy," said Joe. Then, as Tommy turned to speak, he waved him away and said quickly: "I'll talk to you about it in the morning. I've a lot to say, but I'm tired to-night."

But in the morning Joe had gone, as he had often prayed he might, quickly and suddenly and without pain.

XXVII

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"NEVER any more plays," groaned Sandy to Mrs. Heaton, as they sat together in the box and waited for the curtain to rise on her "first night" in New York. "I can't stand this long-drawn-out agony of suspense. This play has been running for more than six months and making money, and yet if the people here turn their thumbs down all that work goes for nothing."

"If they do you'll try again," said Mrs. Heaton, calmly scanning the audience.

"Never," answered Sandy, confidently; "after this the quiet domestic life of a novelist for me."

"Cease groaning," said Mrs. Heaton, "and smile prettily. Here comes Tommy."

Her keen eyes glanced first at one face, then the other, for this was their first meeting in months, and surely she would glean something from it. To her amazement, there was both fear and pain in Sandy's eyes, and a look of apprehension in Tommy's.

"Dear me, I don't understand these young people," Mrs. Heaton said to herself. How could she know that instinctively Sandy looked to see Joe follow Tommy, and then remembered; and that instinctively Tommy shrank from seeing his own pain and loss reflected in Sandy's eyes.

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Mrs. Heaton helped them mightily by insisting on their both pointing out to her "the family," who were seated in the front of the house. Sandy had only arrived in town that afternoon, and hadn't seen any of them yet. They had all agreed it would be better to meet after the performance.

It was six months and more since Sandy had seen their beloved faces, and she felt that in displaying them to Mrs. Heaton she was giving that lady a chance to feast her eyes on the best that the world afforded.

There they were, even Alan and his wife, and Georgina's cablegram wishing her "pyramids of success and love" was tucked in Sandy's laces.

Just at this moment the family caught sight of Sandy, smiled at her singly and collectively, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, she looks all right," said Alan, nervously, then turned on his younger brother. "Geordie, don't breathe so loud. The curtain isn't going up yet."

"For peace' sake, Libbett," Geordie begged, "sit next to me so that I can give your paw an occasional squeeze. I'd rather go up in an airship I'd built myself, any day, than have a sister's pet play acted right before my eyes."

"Hush!" commanded Phyllis, excitedly, "the curtain's going up, I think." And she clutched the Doctor's arm so suddenly that he jumped.

"I'd like to sit on the other side of Nancy, if Lenny 'll move along one," said Micky, plaintively, coming in a little late, as usual. "I'm not going to sit next Mrs. Mac, for she doesn't love me, and I've pretty near broken my neck and my father's heart trying to get here in time."

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"Ye should 'a' come earlier, before we were a' comfortably seated," said Mrs. Mac, severely, leaning back in her orchestra chair and surveying him coldly. She didn't in the least approve of Micky or his religious views. "I willna budge for ye," she continued. "It's a' foolishness, onyway. Georgina's weel oot o' this," she observed, sniffing scornfully at the crowded theater. Mrs. Mac was not to be taken in at this late day by "yin o' Sandy's make-ups."

The curtain finally went up, and immediately all the Sandisons began working harder than any of the actors or Sandy, and with twice the mental and nervous strain. It is a terrible thing to be one of a large, sympathetic, and sensitive family. You live more than one life and suffer more than your share. Every word in that play cost each of those anxious Sandisons untold agony.

It was worth all the suffering, however, for the play was a success, and so was Sandy.

When, at the end of the third act, she came before the curtain for a moment, Phyllis criticized her hair severely, observing that if she had been with her when she was dressing she would not have been allowed to wear it that way. The others had only the usual fault to find with Sandy.

"Look at her drinking it in," said Geordie, voicing it for all. "Doesn't it get you, Alan, to see her doing that same old head-on-one side business before all these people? She's got colossal nerve; that's what Sandy's got—colossal nerve."

"Well, I guess," answered Alan, easily, with a glance about the crowded theater and a swift thought of amusement that it was Red-head's stuff

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was making them all sit up—"I guess it's needed in this business."

Mr. Martin turned to Mrs. Mac. "Wonderful!" he said. "Wonderful! To think it's our Sandy!"

Mrs. Mac wiped her lips primly with her best lace handkerchief before replying: "I dinnae think sae," she said. "If it wasnae for thon bonny leddy in the blue, and thon big man who's wrastling himsel' near oot o' his clothes trying to have a' body excited about him, Sandy's bit words wud be naething. It passes me"—and she sighed—"what they see in it, even wi' a' his hard work." And she applied the handkerchief genteelly again and sat back like a rock, prepared to witness with sympathy the further struggles of the leading man.

Tommy, having been on a tour of inspection and exploration ever since the end of the second act, leaned against the back row of the orchestra and his appraising eye roamed over the house. It was "real money," and shouting itself hoarse for Sandy and her play.

Libbett laughed softly to herself, and Leonard smiled down at her through his queer glasses. "Jolly, isn't it, to have it go this way?" he said.

"Oh yes, but that isn't it, Len," Libbett answered, dimpling. "It's— Oh, Phyllis, doesn't this make you think of 'The Prairie on Fire' and the Out-kitchen? Sandy's got her audience in the state she had us then."

Tommy came down for a between-the-acts visit, and talked of the play and Sandy, to the great displeasure of Mrs. Mac.

"He's weel eneuch," she confided to Mr. Martin, "for a lad whose faither wiz naething, as ye micht

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say; but he's no class, and a' this clash-clashing and gab-gabbing will fair ruin thon Sandy."

When it was all over, the family, after greeting Mrs. Heaton and Sandy's other friends, went home, for it was late and they were commuters. In the now empty theater lobby Tommy alone remained to look after Sandy, who was to stay in town with Mrs. Heaton for a few days. Mrs. Heaton had gone on, leaving word that she expected Tommy and Sandy to join her at the hotel.

Sandy had been behind the scenes thanking the company, and gracefully but firmly declining all the kind invitations to further festivities extended by her delighted theatrical friends, and now came to Tommy announcing that she was quite ready to go.

After one glance at her face Tommy wanted to bundle her into a taxi-cab and take her directly to her hotel. "Then you can say good-by to me," he said, "and trot along to your bed. Never mind supper or me. Stay in bed all day to-morrow, and if Mrs. Heaton's too busy I'll have Phyllis, Nancy, or Libbett in to look after you."

Sandy laughed aloud. "I couldn't possibly, Tommy. There's too much to do; besides, I don't want to sleep. Walk back with me, Tommy, and have supper with us, as Mrs. Heaton has planned. Only please walk. I'd like the cool, fresh air. If it won't make you miss the last train?" she added, hastily.

"I'm staying at the club to-night," Tommy explained, "and I'm here to do exactly what you want."

"Then walk," begged Sandy.

"It's a good long walk," objected Tommy, "and you're not dressed for walking."

"I can manage my gown," said Sandy, "and I'm

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warm, and it's dry and clear, and, oh, Tommy, let's walk! I'm sick to death of cabs and motors. I want some fresh air."

"All right," agreed Tommy. "You shall have it."

For the first few minutes, as they went along the brightly lighted streets watching the returning theater crowds, Sandy talked eagerly of the play and its prospects, and then about the family and what they thought of it.

Then there was a long silence which lasted as they went up the dark side-street and turned into Fifth Avenue with its bright lights, its never-ending, though at this hour somewhat thinned, line of motors and carriages and its few and scattered pedestrians, for now the sidewalks were practically deserted.

Sandy, who had really insisted on walking because she was mortally afraid of intimate conversation with Tommy in a taxi, began to think that silence on a public street may be even more intimate, when Tommy halted her in front of a bookseller's window, and there, in the front rank, in all its brave blue and gold binding, Sandy's new book was displayed.

Tommy looked at her curiously. "This," he said, "and a play on Broadway, with your name in large electric lights, is Fame, isn't it? How do you like it, Sandy?"

Sandy drew a deep breath and said, in a queer, choked voice: "Nothing comes as you plan it or when you want it in this life, does it, Tommy? Here's the success I've worked—and cried—for, and none of the family really need my money now, and—Joe isn't here to care."

"Joe cares, wherever he is," Tommy asserted, stoutly. "I do."

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"I know it," said Sandy, softly; and then, after a little, as they walked on: "I know something else, Tommy. I know now why the play was kept on and allowed to become a success. Mr. Morrison told me."

"What?" said Tommy, brusquely, inwardly condemning Morrison as a silly fool.

"I know all you've done for it—and me," answered Sandy, and her hand closed tightly over his. "It made me feel very angry at first," she said, honestly, "and then it made me feel very small. You see, Tommy, I've gone along thinking I was doing everything for myself; and suddenly this—this made me see plainly how all my life somebody's been looking after me. First old Miss Perkins, then the whole beloved Sandison family, and now—you."

"The success of the play means a lot of money for me," said Tommy, plainly much disturbed. "It was—just a good investment."

"It was for the play—and for me," said Sandy, emphatically. "You've been a good friend to me, Tommy, a good friend—and to Egypt," she added, her eyes shining.

Tommy laughed. "Is that all?" he asked.

Sandy didn't heed him. "I've been thinking a lot about Egypt and what you're doing there and how fine it is. I've been thinking we made a difference to Egypt, after all—we three, you and I and Joe. Just a waif and two strays." She laughed softly. "That's what they called me when I first came to Egypt. An ordinary, poor little waif, who really belonged to another town. Nobody really approved of Father's taking me in. And you and Joe were just two strays. That's how they thought of you

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when you went away. 'Good riddance' was what they said; and now, think what you've done and what we'll do for Egypt before we're through! It was always my dream to—"

But Tommy wasn't thinking of Egypt. He was thinking only of the girl beside him.

"It wasn't mine," he said, shortly. "You first, always. Always I knew I had you to look after first. Egypt came after."

Sandy forgot where she was and stopped still and looked at him. "Tommy!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, let's be honest with each other," said Tommy. "Don't pretend that you didn't know how I felt—how I've always felt. Or if you didn't know, you know now. I'm sick with keeping it to myself. I'm sick with wanting you and with loneliness. I used to be proud of my strength, and now I ache all over with loathing and fear of the long years I'll have to live with myself if you won't share your life with me."

Still Sandy said never a word.

"Don't think I've forgotten that you've work of your own—that you're ambitious as well as I am, but, Sandy, you'll find me useful. I'll help you. You can keep right on. We can do things together. You'll see—if you'll only trust me—I won't interfere—"

Then he stopped abruptly and looked down at her.

"What are you shaking so for?" he asked.

He looked swiftly up the street. There were only two mounted policemen in sight; and policemen are human. He put his arm about her to stop the shaking. He bent his head to hear what she was trying to say.

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It was: "Oh, interfere, Tommy, interfere! I'd love it."

Then, regardless of the fact that it was lighted Fifth Avenue, opposite the University Club, Tommy stooped and kissed her as unconsciously and unhurriedly as though they were walking along dim Rensselaer Road in Egypt, New Jersey.

THE END

